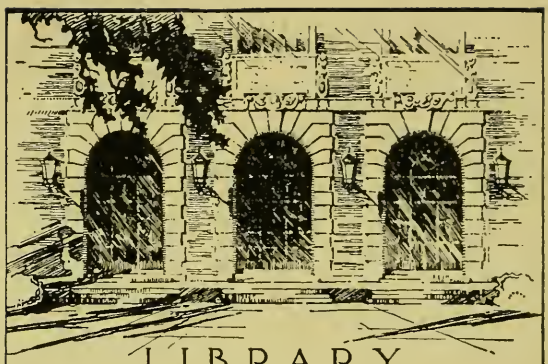
CHARLIE

BY

MRS. WOODWARD



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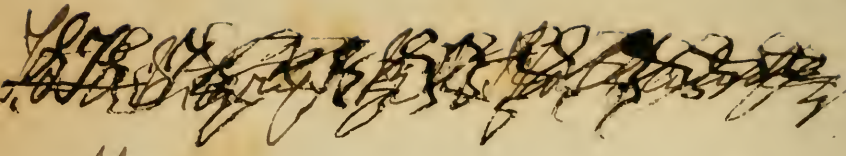

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CHARLIE.

A WAIF'S HISTORY,

TOLD BY HIMSELF.

BY

MRS. WOODWARD,

AUTHOR OF
"MERTONSVILLE PARK," "EDITH VIVIAN'S EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD," "WILL SHE BE HAPPY?" "ELLEN CLINTON," "MR. FAVERSHAM'S NEW YEAR'S GUEST,"
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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CHARLIE.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE STORM BROUGHT FORTH.

"My guide took suddenly hold of me, as a mother who is awoke by some noise, and seeing the flames lighted near her, seizes her child and takes to flight, caring less for herself than for him."

"Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither at the north wind's breath,
And stars to set; but all——
Thou hast all seasons for thine own, O Death!"

Of my infancy I can say but little—*nothing*, perhaps, would be a more suitable word.

Where I was born, or when, or under what circumstances, must for ever remain

shrouded in mystery, one of those deep dark problems which will never be solved on this side the grave—never be known or understood so long as we see things thus dimly and through a glass, often mistaking the shadowy for the real and the false for the true, ignorantly choosing the evil and refusing the good, calling darkness light and bitter sweet, knowing little (and caring less) of all those strange mysterious providences which are taking place before our very eyes—the why and the wherefore of those curious inexplicable dealings which appeal more or less to our senses and sympathies, and, unless we wilfully shut our eyes to the fact, make us realise, at least to a certain extent, that there *is* another and higher existence—a wonderful presence-chamber to be entered, where, the shadows having all fled, we shall see clearly, know as we are known, and be introduced, at once and for ever, into that region of perfect and unending security where earth's "mists and vapours" shall be exchanged for the solid God-given brightness of another and far happier sphere, where there is, and can be, no doubt or peradventure, nothing to mar the harmony of a per-

fect life—a full and entire comprehension! The eyes of our understanding being opened, we shall see face to face, and eye to eye—no mystery too unfathomable, no height too, great, no depth too profound, all being clear as the sunlight, charged with an everlasting radiance beside which earth's shadows will for ever "flee away."

The very utmost I could at any time learn from those who might be supposed to know at least something of my early history was this:

One bleak November afternoon, just as it was beginning to grow dusk, Mrs. Joyce, who occupied a semi-detached cottage at the extreme end of the small fishing village of Saltsea—which, as everyone who happens to be acquainted with that particular part of the country knows, is situated about twelve miles from the ancient cathedral town of Middlebury—went to look out of her window.

She was momentarily expecting her husband; and as his constitution was rather a delicate one, she felt a vague sense of uneasiness as she witnessed the furious storm which just then came pelting down, fearing

lest he might suffer from the exposure and be laid up, as had been the case on more than one previous occasion, with a serious attack of illness in consequence.

While she was anxiously speculating upon the probable chances of his having bethought himself of taking shelter on his way from the square red-brick building which was the scene of his daily labours—he held the arduous post of village schoolmaster—and in this way escaping the keenest edge of the cutting blast, her attention was suddenly arrested by a female figure, which came hurrying along as fast as the battling elements would allow her, carrying in her arms a burden beneath whose weight her slight frame seemed to stagger and well-nigh give way.

This burden was neither more nor less than myself, a pale-faced, dark-eyed boy, aged apparently about two years.

My mother, for such the frail, girlish-looking stranger undoubtedly was, paused for a moment on reaching the little white-painted garden-gate leading up to Mrs. Joyce's cottage, and cast a hasty, beseeching glance at the window, as if mutely asking for shelter.

A few seconds later the cottage-door was thrown hospitably open, and the new-comer invited to take a seat at the fire. Mechanically, and without a word, she sank down in the leather-covered easy-chair which her good-natured hostess brought forward, and after fixing one long earnest gaze at the woman's kindly face, she shut her eyes and lay back with a white, pain-drawn expression, and a gasping sound, between a sigh and a sob.

"Poor thing! you are wet through!" said Mrs. Joyce, eyeing her with a compassionate glance, as she softly touched the sleeve of her dress. "I will go and get you a change of clothes; and then, while your own are drying, you can drink a cup of tea."

Thus saying, she bustled away, and presently returned with sundry garments belonging to herself, in which she essayed to array her unexpected guest.

Her good offices in this respect were, however, quite thrown away; for the stranger seemed utterly incapable of rendering the least assistance, and did not even open her eyes, the long black lashes of which made her colourless face look even more white and

ghastly than before, and almost frightened Mrs. Joyce by its still and death-like appearance.

Once only did she rouse herself, and that was when the anxious woman tried to relieve her from the unnecessary burden of myself, whom she still kept closely clasped in her arms.

Then she gave a sudden start, and fixing a pair of melancholy dark eyes upon Mrs. Joyce's face, said piteously :

"Do not take him away from me ! I cannot give him up. Oh ! Charlie, my boy, my darling ! I will *never* give you up—no, never !"

Some intensely agitating ideas were evidently disturbing her mind as she gave utterance to these few passionate words ; for she glanced around her with a shuddering, terrified gesture, as if expecting to find herself confronted by some much dreaded object.

Her whole frame, too, had become convulsed with a writhing kind of movement which seemed to betoken acute mental agony, and an unnatural fire burned in the large dark eyes, as they once more hungrily

fastened themselves upon my own juvenile features, greatly to the amazement and perplexity of poor bewildered Mrs. Joyce, who afterwards confessed to a certain superstitious presentiment which chilled her very blood, and made her watch her mysterious visitor's proceedings with a sort of awful semi-consciousness that something was about to happen—something which all her feeble efforts would be powerless either to defer or prevent.

And it came! that terrible silent presence which comes to all at one time or another—that relentless enemy which tracks the footsteps alike of the young and the old, stealthily and persistently plucking the sweet dewy floweret which has not yet had time to unclose its perfumed blossom, side by side with the "bearded grain" which has grown ripe, either in good or evil, full ready for the heavenly garner, or to be cast aside as the worthless chaff "which the wind driveth away."

There was no time for speech or action before the end arrived—the end of this brief life so far as my poor suffering mother was concerned (for that she *had* suffered most

profoundly no one could, I think, deny) the beginning of that other state of boundless immortality which has no dark deep river lying at its other end to scare and terrify us, no return to that gloomy shadow-haunted territory which we call "death" to make us start, and shiver, and turn pale.

Just one faint flickering of the snowy eyelids, a pain-drawn gasping sigh, a blue-grey shadow stealing cloud-wise over the faultless features; and then the tension was over, the earthly tenement forsaken, and "life's fitful fever" exchanged for that solemn and majestic calm which invests the inanimate clay with a strange new dignity, and makes the looker-on realise, perhaps for the first time in his or her experience, the awfulness of this vast and inexplicable change, this severing of soul from body, and the silent sailing away of the emancipated spirit upon the unfathomable ocean of immensity, all friendless and forlorn—so far as human love and companionship go—without the power of uttering a single explanatory syllable to the half-stupefied survivors, or casting ever so brief a backward glance from out of that mysterious bourn from whence no traveller returns.

"Heart complaint"—this was the verdict of Mr. Maxwell, the village doctor, when he was hurriedly sent for to throw the light of his professional wisdom upon the case—"accelerated by severe mental excitement."

And his opinion was unanimously subscribed to by certain county magnates, including the clergyman of the parish, who assembled at the inquest which was of course held upon the poor body; and this important matter being settled, the next very natural question which arose was concerning the identity and antecedents of the unfortunate individual, who had so suddenly and mysteriously appeared upon the Saltsea scenes, and been all in a moment summoned to the Eternal World, leaving no sign by which she might be traced, no answer to the puzzling inquiry as to who she was, and whence she came, and whither going, when death had arrested her footsteps, and snatched her away from the child whom she had just declared she would never give up: all remained dark and uncertain, without a single ray of light to solve the doubt or set the public mind at rest as to the peculiar circumstances under which this youthful-looking,

ill-starred stranger had found herself in this particular locality, and what her object had been in coming there at all.

Certain of the village gossips, taking one thing with another, sagely gave it as their firm conviction that she had purposely chosen this apparently out-of-the-way and insignificant spot as a possible future residence, in order that her whereabouts might not be discovered by those who had—or she fancied they had—conspired to separate her from myself. Others averred that the wild passionate words she had spoken were merely the ravings of a death-distorted imagination, and must not therefore be looked upon as the sober and rational utterances of one who fully realised what she was saying.

I have good reason for knowing that Mrs. Joyce did not agree with this latter supposition, and she always shook her head very solemnly, and pursed her thin lips together with an expression of superior wisdom, whenever anyone ventured in her presence to suggest that the halo of romance which she had insisted on throwing around the poor dead stranger was out of place, and inconsistent with the prosaic tendencies of this

matter-of-fact age. She knew better, or thought she did; and not all the arguments in the world would have convinced her that her unknown guest was an ordinary person, or that the circumstances under which she had sought her roof had been in any way natural or commonplace.

Her husband, too, rather sided with her in investing the affair with a kind of special import, a mysterious halo of dignity which he felt rather than understood, and would doubtless have been quite at a loss to explain in a lucid and satisfactory manner to the generality of his Saltsea acquaintances.

He never forgot the little scene he witnessed when, coming home that stormy afternoon almost drenched with the pelting storm, he found his own comfortable easy-chair occupied by a dying—nay, a dead woman; nor the look of mingled terror and dismay depicted upon his wife's face, as she gazed with awe-stricken dilated eyes upon the quickly changing features, the misery and unrest all disappearing beneath the impress of this mighty conqueror, and a great and majestic calm descending in their place; nor the timid frightened glances with which I

was regarding my new surroundings, having succeeded at length in extricating myself from those protecting arms which had no longer the power to enfold me in their loving embrace, or defend me from the real or imaginary evils with which I was in her eyes apparently threatened. *No ;* never to his dying day would the remembrance of that touching little *tableau* be effaced from Joseph Joyce's memory, or the outburst of grief which presently followed, when, with the unerring instinct of childhood, I discovered that something was wrong, and began piteously to appeal to my dead mother for that comfort and sympathy which had probably never before been denied me.

What followed will be readily imagined. The doctor sent for in hot haste, one or two of the nearest neighbours called in to assist Mrs. Joyce in this unlooked-for emergency, my own small self soothed and petted and fed and conveyed to bed ; and *then* a long and serious consultation held as to what steps should be taken by way of finding out who the unhappy stranger was, and how her friends or relations should be communicated with, before the last sad rites were performed and

the poor motionless clay consigned to its kindred dust, to await the stupendous hour when the graves shall open, and the dead arise.

Mr. Maxwell kindly undertook to send advertisements to all the local papers, giving a full description of the deceased, and asking for information as to whence she came and whither she was going when thus brought face to face with the last dread foe, and obliged to lay down her life's burden and pass away into the regions of the Great Unknown.

But all his efforts to obtain a clue to her identity were unavailing, and she was at length buried in the village churchyard, a stranger in a strange place, her name even being a mystery to those who took part in the solemn service.

Her linen bore the simple initials L. H., which, as Mrs. Joyce sagely observed, might mean anything, and afforded them no information whatever on a subject which seemed to them just then of such paramount importance.

She was evidently not in *want*, for her purse contained twenty sovereigns, and in addition to the plain gold circlet on the

wedding-finger there was a magnificent diamond ring, which inspired the simple country people with a sort of awe, as being suggestive of a higher social standing than their own, and went far towards making them regard my insignificant self with a decidedly favourable eye, not knowing what important personage I might eventually turn out, or the extent of the good fortune which might possibly await me as soon as the news of my present friendless and unprotected position should reach the ears of those of my relatives who might be supposed to feel an interest in my welfare, and come forward and charge themselves with the responsibility of bringing me up.

As the days and weeks passed by, however, and no one appeared to lay claim to me, the excitement gradually calmed down, and the good people among whom my strange lot was thus suddenly cast ceased to speculate about my future, or to trouble themselves, in fact, about me at all, beyond favouring Mrs. Joyce with an occasional visit for the purpose of critically examining my personal appearance, giving their opinion respecting the as yet undeveloped tendencies

of my infant character, and volunteering a vast amount of kindly meant though slightly inconvenient advice as to the most advisable course to be adopted with regard to me, and the best way of providing for my present and future well-being.

There was a good deal of surprise expressed, and not a little disapprobation in certain quarters, when the grave-featured, tender-hearted schoolmaster announced his intention of adopting the motherless child who had been so mysteriously consigned to his guardianship.

"If his friends ever *do* come forward and claim him, well and good," he firmly, though respectfully, observed to Mr. Maxwell, when he remonstrated with him on the subject, "but so long as he stands in need of a home, and I am able to provide one for him, he shall have it."

And to this resolution he nobly adhered, treating, me during the twelve years it was my good fortune to dwell under his roof, with the most unselfish and devoted kindness—just the same, indeed, as if I had been his very own child.

Mrs. Joyce was in her way equally kind.

She was a good-natured, easy-going kind of person, with not much strength of character, but a profound respect for the superior wisdom of her more studiously inclined husband; and as she had no children of her own (the only one which had ever been born to her having died in infancy), she gladly agreed to his suggestion that so long, at any rate, as no one appeared to dispute their right to my small person, they would retain possession of me themselves, and conjointly do their best to fulfil a parent's duties with regard to me.

They were rather awkwardly situated as to what I should be called—not a scrap of information on this important subject having been elicited by the most careful examination into the contents of my dead mother's pocket. There was no letter or writing of any kind to be found; nothing but those two ambiguous initial letters, which might stand for so many different names.

Finally, it was decided by my adopted parents that, considering the peculiar circumstances under which I had made my first appearance in their midst, I should go by the appropriate surname of *Hail*, or Hale,

as it was afterwards rendered. There was, of course, no manner of question concerning my Christian name, my poor mother's last significant words having settled that point beyond the shadow of a doubt.

To the simple Saltsea people, therefore, I soon became known as Charles, or Charlie, Hale; and by this appellation I have gone ever since, and shall probably never change it for another until my own life's journey shall be ended, and all that is now hidden from my dim, mist-blinded eyes be clearly revealed.

In looking back through the long vista of years upon this period of my early life, it always gives me a thrill of pleasurable satisfaction to remember Mrs. Joyce's oft-repeated assurance that I was a remarkably quiet child, and gave her very little unnecessary trouble with regard to my upbringing.

It almost seemed as if, in some mysterious way, I had been conversant with my mother's troubles and sufferings, and had become in consequence far more thoughtful and grave than most children of my own age.

I discovered, too, an aptitude for learning which rejoiced good Mr. Joyce's heart, and made him devote himself to the work of my

early education with an eager, zealous interest which had the effect of quickening my own desires after learning, and making me anxious to take full advantage of the opportunities thus afforded me of making progress in all those particular branches of study which he from time to time considered it advisable to bring before my youthful mind.

Often and often, when quite a child, have I silently wondered at the wistfully dissatisfied gaze with which Mrs. Joyce was wont to regard me, as I sat quite still in my little chair, poring over some book which her husband had entrusted me with, or trying to get by heart some lesson which he had requested me to learn, and heard her mutter to herself certain foreboding words about the dangerous consequences which might be expected to follow from so early and exclusive an attention to what she vaguely termed "cramming the brain;" but father—I had been brought up to call them father and mother—only laughed at her fears, and told her he knew perfectly well how much I could stand, and was under no apprehension whatever of my overdoing it.

It is just possible that but for the periodical seasons of recreation which I enjoyed, when we would wander hand-in-hand—myself and the schoolmaster—along the seashore, drinking in the invigorating breezes, and finding at every step some object to delight and interest us, I might have suffered from mental overwork; but instinctively Mr. Joyce seemed to know when I had had enough, and always came at the right moment and bade me shut up my books, and go forth with himself on these little excursions, which afforded us both the most intense pleasure.

As time passed on I was dimly conscious of a slight feeling of surprise that he never proposed to take me with him to the village school, by way of saving himself the extra, and, as many no doubt considered it, unnecessary trouble of instructing me during his own few leisure hours.

What his real reasons were for wishing to keep me apart from the rough fisher children he never fully explained; but I can quite understand that it was out of pure kindness to myself that he thus preferred to undertake this additional labour rather than allow me to be brought into too close a contact with those

whose example he might perhaps have feared would not be altogether good for me.

My temperament, too, was rather a peculiar one, being characterised by that extreme pride and sensitiveness which so often marks the disposition of those who are of an unusually studious tone of mind; and I can well believe that my kind and thoughtful guardian was afraid lest I might suffer by being exposed to the blunt-edged familiarity —not to say coarseness—of boys who were not as a class distinguished for any particular delicacy or refinement of spirit, and who might therefore have unintentionally wounded me at every turn, by making me miserably conscious of the uncongenial nature of my own surroundings, and entire dissimilarity in thought and feeling to themselves.

CHAPTER II.

A SUCCESSFUL PLUNGE.

"Politeness costs nothing and gains everything."

"I am young, it is true; but in noble souls valour does not wait for years."

"Courage mounteth with occasion."

One of the most common of our walks led through the village churchyard, which was lined by an avenue of fine old oak-trees, on either side of which reposed the silent dead within sound and sight of the boundless ocean, which lay like a blue mirror far below, and could be reached by a flight of steps leading from the cliff to the sands—a somewhat precipitous mode of descent which struck my boyish fancy as most delightful, from the very fact, perhaps, of its being so

little used by anyone except ourselves, and being, moreover, apparently attended with some little risk, in consequence of the unevenness of the steps and the crumbling nature of the cliff itself, which often, especially after a storm, showed very decided signs of giving way.

Mr. Joyce declared, however, that there was no real danger, and he treated all the warnings which he received on the subject with a good-humoured though sceptical smile, and pursued his own way just as if they had never been uttered.

Often he would pause midway down the long dusky avenue, and point to a modest white stone surrounded by a few neatly kept shrubs and plants, and in a low sympathetic voice repeat to me the little story which I was never tired of hearing of my poor mother's untimely end; and as I gazed with earnest, wistful eyes upon the two mysterious letters L. H., which meant I knew not what, and then went on slowly and reverently to read the words inscribed below:

"AND THERE WAS A GREAT CALM,"

I felt my young heart stirred with emo-

tions the cause of which I could not well have explained, but which were nevertheless very real and abiding; a strange wonder thrilled through my whole being, an awed, reverent feeling which made me fancy somehow that I was in church listening to the organ's solemn peal, just as I sometimes heard it when my kind guardian took me of a Saturday afternoon to attend the cathedral service at Middlebury, where the music was acknowledged by everyone to be something most uncommon in its elevating grandeur.

"You see, Charlie," musingly observed Mr. Joyce, one lovely afternoon when we stood thus together in front of my mother's grave, "some people blamed me for putting up this stone at all: it was a useless piece of extravagance!—others shrugged their shoulders over the words, and asked me what I meant by them; but everyone has his crotchets, you know, and when I saw your poor dead mother's face so calm and still after all the passion and excitement which had so lately troubled her, I instantly thought of this text. It seemed as if the dear Lord had suddenly appeared Himself,

and stilled and comforted her, just as he quieted the raging sea of Galilee; and then, instead of the fret and flurry of earth's storms and fitful fever, there came a great and abiding calm."

Thus saying, he put on his hat, which he invariably removed when standing by the side of this stranger's grave, and silently led the way down the cliff.

One singular feature in our intercourse consisted in the fact that he always spoke to me as if I understood him. To no other living creature, I believe, did he ever reveal what was passing in his mind so plainly as he did to myself, despite my youth and inexperience.

Perhaps my grave face and preternaturally thoughtful manner may have attracted him, and made him give me credit for a wider and more comprehensive scale of reasoning than I was actually capable of; or perhaps he recognised so far a kindred spirit, in that I could sympathise when I could not pretend to understand; and, however dark and abstruse the subject of his conversation might be, I had too thorough and loving a respect for him even to dream of interrupting him with

my own childish and frivolous ideas, but listened rather like one who drinks in the tender melody of some thrilling and entrancing song which falls for the first time upon his charmed ear, and from which, although the language is new to him, he can yet derive sufficient delight and enjoyment to render it by no means a wasted effort.

My own character, too, had probably developed much quicker than that of most boys of my age, and living in this close companionship with a man of such peculiarly grave and abstracted ideas—one, too, who never associated with his neighbours or condescended to evince even the faintest interest in the petty everyday trifles which were taking place around him, may have quickened my powers of discernment and made me more able to appreciate a character which, as it little by little unfolded before my dawning intellect, filled me with the deepest awe and veneration, and a kind of grateful, idolatrous love with which no other mortal man has ever inspired me, and never will, now that the object of my first fresh boyish devotion is gone—a devotion which I honestly believe

to have had the same strength and intensity as though I had been a full-grown man, able to look upon things from a man's standpoint, and bring the whole weight of a strong and mature affection to bear upon the subject which he singles out as worthy of being enshrined in the heart's inner sanctuary—worthy of being loved first and foremost, better than one's self—better even than one's life!

But I must not anticipate.

Behold me, kind reader, at the age of ten, a dark-haired, dark-eyed, pale-faced youth, tall and slender, with just sufficient difference in my manner and appearance to the rest of the village boys to furnish certain black sheep among them (whose society I had been carefully taught to eschew) with the power of inflicting a wound upon my sensitiveness by levelling at me, whenever they had an opportunity of doing so without my guardian's knowledge, the sneering epithet of "Gentleman Charlie!" and as I was quite aware that this term was, coming from their lips, the reverse of complimentary, I naturally felt somewhat aggrieved in consequence, though I would not for the world have called Mr. Joyce's attention to the fact, or allowed

him to suspect that I was treated with anything but kindness and respect by the entire youthful community.

About this time Mr. Vaughan, the clergyman of the parish began to notice me. He had from the first set his face against the schoolmaster's plan of adopting me; and for several years paid no more attention to me than if I had not existed at all; but one day, as I was returning from a distant farmhouse, whither I had gone with a message from Mrs. Joyce, I happened to come across himself and his daughter, a lovely, golden-haired, violet-eyed child about eight years of age, close beside a small wicket gate which stood in our path. Quite instinctively, and without a moment's hesitation, I held it open for them to pass through, doffing my cap meanwhile.

A look of unmistakable interest suddenly appeared on the clergyman's face, and he smiled approvingly, saying good-naturedly:

"That's right, my boy; there's nothing like politeness."

After this he invariably stopped and spoke to me whenever we met, and occasionally he paid a visit to the schoolmaster's

cottage, a thing he had not previously been in the habit of doing.

He was, in fact, rather unpopular among his parishioners, in consequence of his non-visiting proclivities; and his manner towards his inferiors was slightly dogmatic and arbitrary, and sometimes characterised by a touch of haughtiness, especially when, as in Mr. Joyce's case, he had—or at any rate fancied so—reason to find fault with him for not having followed the particular line of action which he had himself recommended with regard to the disposal of my own small person on the melancholy occasion of my poor mother's death.

Take him all in all, however, Mr. Vaughan was not a bad sort of man. His pride, it is true, prevented him from appearing in the same pleasant and amiable light as other people would under similar circumstances have done; and being, moreover, a very wealthy man, and of considerable influence in the neighbourhood, he was rather inclined to give himself airs accordingly, and expect everyone to bow to his superior wisdom, and be implicitly guided by his decision in any

matter which he happened to interest himself about.

When therefore he discovered that the sage advice with which he condescended to favour the village schoolmaster respecting myself, was not followed, but that, in spite of his counsel, the kind-hearted man insisted on retaining possession of me himself rather than consigning me to the questionable guardianship of a cold and heartless world, as represented by one of those charitable institutions to which Mr. Vaughan had intended to send me in the event of no friends or relations appearing to claim me, he became exceedingly indignant, and for several years, as I have already mentioned, made a point of ignoring me altogether, and treating my adopted parents with scant civility whenever he chanced to be brought into personal contact with them.

I strongly suspect, however, from what I have since seen and heard of the clergyman's disposition, that, notwithstanding the apparent unkindness and disrespect with which he treated Mr. Joyce, he all the time entertained towards him a certain feeling of esteem for thus persisting in acting up to his own

ideas of what was right and proper to be done, rather than blindly suffering himself to be led by the opinions of others.

Be this as it may, he certainly contrived in a hundred ways to show by his subsequent conduct that he was ready to look over anything in the past which had at the time produced an irritating effect upon himself, and by the kindly notice he took of me, and the various questions which he from time to time put as to the progress I was making in my studies, the particular bent of my mind, and the general consistency of my boyish demeanour, it was quite evident that he was beginning to regard me with some sort of interest, a kind of latent satisfaction, originating, probably, from the discovery which he had made of my own proficiency in certain branches of study which possessed a peculiar attraction for himself.

A trifling incident, which occurred too about this time, had the effect of making him look upon me with even more kindness and favour than before.

I had been sent to the vicarage with a note which required an answer: as far as I can recollect, it bore some reference to a forth-

coming examination which was to take place in the village school, and Mr. Vaughan's opinions had to be asked on certain points connected with the important ceremony.

On reaching the house and presenting my letter, I was informed that the vicar was at that moment engaged with a gentleman on urgent business, but that, if I chose to wait for half an hour, he would probably be free to answer the communication with which I had been entrusted.

After considering the matter for a moment, I decided that I would call again.

"Perhaps you might like to stroll about in the grounds?" suggested the servant, as, having left the letter in her charge, I was turning away with the intention of retracing my steps down the long avenue; "the roses are in perfection just now, and if you take that path," pointing with her finger towards a private-looking covered walk, which lay in the opposite direction, "it will bring you straight into the flower-garden."

"Are you sure Mr. Vaughan would not mind?" I asked, somewhat doubtfully, for I was a proudly sensitive boy, and hated the idea of having even the appearance of

wishing to intrude upon another person's premises.

"Oh no!" was the reassuring response; "my master's always pleased for people to look at his flowers; and I'm sure," glancing at me with a half smile, "you are far too steady to do any mischief."

"Well, I hope so," I said, lifting my head rather proudly as I walked away; for when was I *ever* known to do mischief? and, even if I had been, was it at all likely that I should attempt anything of the kind on the property of a man of whom I stood so much in awe as Mr. Vaughan?

Besides, I had a passion for flowers! I loved and reverenced them to that degree that I would almost as soon have inflicted actual torture upon one of the most sensitive of my fellow-creatures as ruthlessly handled even the smallest blossom; and boy though I was, I felt my pulses quicken, and a glow of exquisite pleasure take possession of my whole frame, when I presently found myself standing, like one entranced, within the charming precincts of the vicarage garden.

Such a garden it was! Even yet I seem to see it as it then for the first time appeared

to my delighted eyes. Roses everywhere! Not that other flowers were wanting, but this was the one chief feature in the scene—*this*, and a marvellous fountain, which sent up its refreshing spray in the exact centre of the garden, which was of a perfectly circular shape, and had been laid out, as I afterwards discovered, according to a peculiar theory of Mr. Vaughan's own; the tallest standard trees being arranged to form a flowery hedge in the background, while the other rows followed in harmonious gradation, until the last line, consisting of the tiniest specimens of dwarf roses, was reached, forming the inner circle of all, and separated only from the fountain by a smoothly gravelled pathway, from whence the full beauty of the scene could be obtained—a roseate fairy-like scene, such as could never be wholly forgotten by so intensely enthusiastic an admirer of floral beauty as myself.

It almost seemed as if I had caught a passing glimpse of paradise! The soft sighing sound of the gentle summer breeze fell like the music of æolian harps upon my charmed ear: the perfumed air stole gratefully over my half-bewildered senses: the golden sunshine, as it

flickered lovingly over the delicately tinted blossoms, and sparkled like diamond sprays in each crystal jet as it first rose and then fell into the marble basin below, wherein disported a glittering phalanx of gold and silver fish, all conspired to make me feel as if I had suddenly stepped into a new world, another and, up to the present moment, undreamt-of existence, such as steeped my whole being in a sort of intoxicating pleasure, the like of which I had never previously conceived of, never even believed it possible for any human being to experience.

Out of this trance-like state of rapturous enjoyment I was at length rudely awakened by hearing a piercing cry, instantly followed by another; and before its echo had died away there was a sudden splash, just as if something or other, not far from where I stood, had fallen into the water—though, but for the before-mentioned fountain, I had not the most remote idea that there *was* any water so close at hand, and I felt puzzled therefore exceedingly to know which way I should wend my footsteps so as to arrive at the scene of danger, and find out whether my poor services could be of use.

Without waiting to reason the matter over in my mind, however, I darted away in the direction from which the sound had appeared to proceed, and a very few steps brought me in sight of an artificial lake or pond, in which a couple of tame white swans were majestically sailing about, while at the further end—oh, horror of horrors!—I could plainly perceive the lovely golden-haired child of whom I have already spoken in the act of sinking beneath the shimmering water.

What could I do? Not a soul was in sight; there was no time to summon assistance from the house; and—I was but a lad.

Still I was not wholly wanting in presence of mind, and I think I may add that, so far as personal danger was concerned, I was naturally courageous. Fortunately, too, both for myself and the fair child who was struggling in the lake, I had lately been taking a few swimming lessons from Mr. Joyce, so that I was not quite so helpless as I might under other circumstances have been.

Scarcely waiting therefore to tear off my jacket, I boldly plunged into the water, and, *how* I managed it I know not—it all seems

like a dream to me now—*but,* the next thing I remember was standing once more, panting and exhausted, upon *terra firma,* grasping the inanimate form of the half-drowned child in my arms, and vaguely wondering how I should get her conveyed to the house.

For there was no denying the fact that now that the effort was over my own strength was expended ; my knees shook and trembled just as if I had been suddenly seized with an attack of the ague ; while a strange feeling of deadly faintness crept over me, such as I had never before experienced, accompanied by a curious sensation in my right wrist, which made me suspect what afterwards turned out to be correct, that I had contrived in some way or other to give it a severe sprain which would effectually prevent my using it for some time to come, and that it would be perfectly useless for me to attempt even to carry my rescued charge ever so short a distance without assistance. Laying her gently down upon the grass, therefore, I was just about to proceed in quest of help, when a pleasant-looking middle-aged woman made her opportune appearance, and re-

lieved me from all further anxiety in the matter.

"Oh, what has happened?" she cried, rushing up to me and bending over the still insensible child with a white scared face.

"I think she will soon be all right," I answered, trying hard to look and speak as naturally as possible, "she was not long in the water, and——"

"Oh, my darling!" exclaimed the woman, in a voice of excessive emotion. "I must get her home at once," she added, setting her lips firmly together as she lifted her in her arms and prepared to carry her away; "and as for you, my poor boy," she said this very kindly, as she for the first time caught sight of my face, "just stay where you are for a few minutes, and I will send some one to look after you."

I made no answer, but my eyes followed them until they were out of sight, and then, with a low gasping sound, I sank down upon the greensward, and a minute or two later I had become unconscious.

In this state I was found by the gardener, who had been sent in quest of me, and he took me straight away to the lodge and put

me in charge of his wife, a sensible motherly kind of woman, who soon found out the best mode of treating me by way of once more restoring my scattered senses and ascertaining what was the matter with my wrist.

She looked very grave when she proceeded to examine the latter, after my fainting fit was over, and I sat up on the capacious chintz-covered sofa and tried to persuade her that I must go home.

"There will be no going home for you to-day, I'm thinking, my dear," she observed, shaking her head, "so you may just as well make yourself comfortable where you are."

"But indeed I *must* go," I persisted, glancing impatiently at a large old-fashioned clock which showed me that it was already past the hour when Mr. Joyce usually returned from the school; "they will be getting anxious about me."

"Now don't fret," she soothingly made reply; "just wait until your clothes are dry, at any rate, and then we shall see what Mr. Maxwell says."

"Mr. Maxwell?" I remonstrated, in dismayed surprise.

"Yes, he has gone up to the house, you

know, to see after Miss Laura, and is going to look in on his way back. And you needn't trouble about the Joyces," she continued reassuringly, "as my husband promised me he would call and tell them what was detaining you." Here she once more eyed my rapidly swelling arm with a grave compassionate glance, and then hastily turned her back upon me, and proceeded to look out of the window.

CHAPTER III.

HORS DE COMBAT.

"To each his sufferings: all are men
Condemn'd alike to groan;
The tender for another's pain,
The unfeeling for his own."

"Youth, what man's age is like to be, doth show;
We may our ends by our beginnings know."

"The child is father of the man."

MEANTIME, I was beginning to feel very hot and restless, and the pain in my arm seemed every moment to grow more and more acute, and although I did my best to call up a smile when the lodge door was presently opened, and my kind-hearted guardian made his appearance, I fear, judging from the grave concerned air with which he regarded me, that my own face must have presented a

very woe-begone expression, despite my efforts to look cheerful.

"My poor Charlie!" he said, laying his hand fondly upon my curly head; and the tender sympathising tone brought a sudden rush of tears to my eyes, while my lip quivered painfully, and I had much ado to prevent myself from giving way altogether, so thoroughly unstrung were my nerves, and so hard a task did I find it to maintain my usual self-contained manner.

"He's a regular hero, sir, that's what he is!" observed my good-natured hostess, "I don't believe there's another boy for fifty miles round who would have done what he did."

Under other circumstances this encomium might perhaps have afforded me some slight feeling of gratification, but I was far too miserable just then to derive any comfort from it; and when a minute or two later Mr. Maxwell joined the party and began to rally me in his peculiar way upon what had occurred, I could not even pretend to answer him, though just as he was about to examine my wrist I did contrive to put a brief question to him as to how Miss Vaughan was getting on.

"Oh, she's all right," was his re-assuring reply, and mingling with my pain there came a certain glow of satisfaction in the knowledge of her safety.

"Now I must see what I can do for you," proceeded the doctor, and with a touch tender as that of any woman, he took my poor aching hand in his own, and began to examine into the extent of the injuries which my late feat had entailed upon me.

The gentlest touch, however, was productive of agony, and called forth an irrepressible moan from my parched lips, which, I felt rather than saw, sent poor Mr. Joyce away to the other end of the room with an anguished face and an intensely sorrowful heart, so utterly unnerved was he when called upon to witness anything like physical suffering.

Just for one moment I felt my whole frame racked with the most exquisite torture, and then a handkerchief was suddenly held to my nostrils, and a strange dreamy sensation stole over me, making me forget that there *was* such a thing even as pain, and—what happened after that remains a blank.

When I at length regained consciousness, I found myself lying comfortably back upon the old-fashioned sofa, feeling very weak and helpless, with my right arm tightly bandaged from the elbow downwards, and Mr. Maxwell regarding me with a sort of grave complacency which seemed to intimate that he had performed a difficult task, and performed it well.

Mr. Joyce, too, looked relieved, though his thin face was very pale, and showed traces of recent emotion.

"It's all over, Charlie my boy," he exclaimed, taking out his handkerchief and passing it hastily across his forehead, "and now you have only got to rest."

"Can't I go home, father?" I faintly asked, though I knew pretty well, without hearing it, what the answer would be.

"I only wish you could," was the decided reply; "but Mr. Maxwell says it is absolutely necessary for you to remain perfectly quiet for the next few days, and Mrs. Grimshaw," turning courteously to the gardener's wife, "has kindly promised to take every care of you, and make you as comfortable as she possibly can."

"Yes, you needn't be afraid, my dear," chimed in the good woman, "I'll look after you right well. His reverence has just sent down a message to say you were to be taken to the big house at once," she continued, in a voice of considerable awe, "but the doctor won't allow you to be moved even *that* short distance, so you have no help for it, you see, but to stay where you are."

"I'd rather be here than at the vicarage," I answered frankly.

"Would you really, now?" she exclaimed, evidently very much pleased at my decision, "well, I'm glad of that, at any rate," and she rewarded me with an approving smile, as she proceeded to put a second pillow under my head.

"Now I think a little sleep would be advisable," quietly observed Mr. Maxwell, after putting his finger upon my uninjured wrist, in order to feel the pulse.

"I suppose I may stay?" I heard Mr. Joyce inquire, in a low anxious tone.

"Better not," was the firmly significant reply; "he will fall asleep much sooner if he is left alone, and besides," this was added in a more peremptory voice, apparently in answer

to some remonstrance on the part of my guardian, "you ought to go home and look after your wife; otherwise she will be getting quite uneasy at your long stay, and perhaps be coming off herself to see what has happened. You can tell her, you know, that the fewer people he sees just now the better. I shall look in again myself before I go to bed, and will call if you like and satisfy you as to how he is getting on."

"Thank you, I should be very grateful to you if you would," responded Mr. Joyce, and then they all went away together, leaving me alone.

I heard their voices for a few minutes longer in the next room, mingled occasionally with a loud bass tone, which I hazily recognised as belonging to the vicar, but almost before I had ceased to wonder what his unexpected presence might mean I had drifted into the land of dreams.

When I awoke I almost fancied at first it must be the middle of the night, so unbroken was the silence which surrounded me. The light, too, had been carefully excluded by the closing of the window shutters, and although I could plainly hear the ticking

of the old-fashioned clock, I could not see to what hour its hands pointed.

While I was speculating on this subject, and beginning to feel, if the truth must be confessed, just a trifle home-sick and low-spirited, my solitude was suddenly enlivened by the welcome appearance of Mrs. Grimshaw, who came in bearing a candle in one hand and a cup of beef-tea in the other.

She opened the door very quietly, evidently expecting to find me still asleep, but when she caught sight of my wide-open eyes she smiled very pleasantly, and at once set about the task of getting me to partake of the strengthening concoction which had, she informed me, been prepared by Mr. Vaughan's cook for my especial benefit.

This matter disposed of, Mrs. Grimshaw's next proceeding was to re-arrange the cushions of my couch, by way of what she called settling me in for the night; and when she had accomplished this, apparently to her own satisfaction, she established herself in a chair at my side and prepared to wait for the doctor's second promised visit.

"There's no fear of his forgetting to come," she confidently observed, when I

feebly suggested that she might probably have the trouble of sitting up for nothing; "he's a very kind-hearted man is Mr. Maxwell, though his manner sometimes makes people think differently."

"I wonder why he wouldn't let me go home?" I said, in what I fear must have sounded an ungrateful tone, for my arm felt very uncomfortable, and my poor head ached fearfully, so that it was not quite surprising nor altogether inexcusable perhaps that I should be conscious, notwithstanding all Mrs. Grimshaw's kindness and attention, of a certain sensation of loneliness and sinking of heart, on thus finding myself for the first time separated from the only friend I had ever known, and called upon probably to toss restlessly about during the live-long night, a prey to those strange new pains which seemed so suddenly to have taken possession of my frame.

Nothing of all this, however, did I say to my kindly attendant, not wishing, on the one hand, to have the appearance even of ingratitude, and shrinking on the other, with a kind of instinctive reserve which generally characterised me in my dealings with

strangers from clothing my secret feelings in words when, as in this case, they related solely and entirely to my own individual self.

"You were not fit for it, my dear," she answered soothingly, after glancing at me with an expression of considerable surprise; "even now you seem rather feverish, I think"—here she laid her hand lightly upon my burning forehead; "and it would never do to move you so long as there is anything of this kind to be dreaded."

A smothered groan was my only response, and I shut my eyes resolutely, and pressed my lips firmly together, determined if possible to keep back all further expression of my present painful sensations, so long, at all events, as *she* was in the room.

Mr. Joyce had so often impressed upon me the duty of self-control, that it is just possible I exaggerated its importance at this particular juncture, and set myself a harder task than it was at all necessary that I should perform.

I rather think, from the few leading questions which Mr. Maxwell put to me when he at length joined us, that his keen

dark eyes must have taken in the situation at a glance, and I almost imagined there was something like an undercurrent of sympathy in his manner, as, after gently examining my bandaged arm, he sat down and began to talk on other subjects, still keeping his gaze, however, intently fixed upon my flushed face.

"You are very restless," he said at last, rising abruptly from his chair and looking down upon me with a half smile, "and your poor head is aching sadly."

"Yes," I confessed, in a reluctant undertone.

"And you have been crying too?" this was added questioningly.

"No, oh no!" I exclaimed, rousing myself to repudiate so unexpected a charge.

"Well, it's all the same thing," was the conclusive rejoinder, "you've been very near it, at all events," and with a curious expression upon his face Mr. Maxwell once more took my hot hand in his and gravely felt my pulse.

This done he turned away, asked for water and a wine glass, and taking a small bottle from his pocket, began to pour out a few drops of some dark-looking fluid, which he

the next moment put to my lips, saying cheerfully :

"Drink this my boy—it will make you feel quite comfortable."

"Will it ?" I somewhat dubiously inquired as I obeyed his instructions, not very hopeful in my own mind as to the result.

"Yes, unless I am greatly mistaken, you will forget all your troubles in a few minutes, and when I see you to-morrow morning I shall find that you have had a long sleep."

Even as he spoke a pleasurable sensation seemed to be stealing over me, a sort of dreamy condition which had the effect of making myself and my surroundings appear in a hazy far-away light, just as if my own identity had been suddenly merged in that of someone else ; and the pain which had been previously tormenting me died away as if by magic, leaving me conscious only of a vague sense of indescribable satisfaction and relief, without being exactly capable of analysing the feeling or understanding from whence so unexpected a transition had arisen.

The following morning Mr. Maxwell pronounced me decidedly better, though he shrugged his shoulders and smiled derisively

when Mr. Joyce mildly suggested that it might do me no harm to be taken home.

"If all goes well he *may* be fit for it a week hence," was the significant dictum, "but certainly not before."

From which it will be seen that my injuries were none of the lightest, and that the painful sensations to which I have alluded were only what might, under the circumstances, have been expected.

Shortly after breakfast I received a visit from no less a personage than Mr. Vaughan himself; and his usual pompous and slightly supercilious manner was strangely softened and subdued as he came up to me, and told me I had saved his daughter's life.

"It was only a chance, sir," I murmured, quite overcome by this extraordinary condescension on the part of a man of whom I stood so much in awe as the unapproachable vicar.

"Indeed, my boy, it was a merciful providence," he answered, in a voice of much emotion. "*How* you managed to escape as well as you did I cannot conceive. You must have wonderful presence of mind for one so young," and he eyed me curiously.

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"I had not time to think," I responded, somewhat incoherently, "and I don't quite know how it happened, but I fancy I must have got hold of the branch of a tree, or something of that kind, which helped me."

"I only wish you had not suffered quite so much yourself," observed Mr. Vaughan, looking compassionately down upon my flushed face.

"Thank you, sir," I replied; "I dare say I shall be better soon."

"I hope so, I am sure," he acquiesced; "it must be very dull for you, lying here."

"Oh, I don't mind it so much to-day!" I said, trying to speak in a cheerful tone; "last night was the worst," I added, with a little shudder as I remembered all that I had gone through.

"My poor boy! I wish I could make it easier for you;" and an expression of good-humoured perplexity came into the proud face.

He did not linger long after this, but Mrs. Grimshaw informed me that he had given her strict injunctions to look well after my comfort, and that all sorts of good things in

the way of nourishment had been sent from the vicarage for my use.

Mrs. Joyce came and sat with me for a long time that afternoon, and the next day, soon after I had partaken of my early dinner and was lying placidly back with my eyes shut, unconsciously listening to the movements of my kindly hostess as she moved backwards and forwards in the little kitchen beyond, putting away the things, and, as she termed it, "tidying up," the door of my room was suddenly opened, and I became vaguely aware of some unwonted presence near me.

Glancing quickly up, therefore, I found to my intense astonishment that the little fairy-like child whom I had so fortunately rescued from the water was standing close beside me, gazing at me with a sort of wondering awe in her lovely violet eyes, while a middle-aged woman, apparently her nurse, seemed also to be regarding me with a grave speculative face, as if mentally engaged in forming then and there a conclusion as to my own individual merits.

The latter was the first to break the silence.

"Miss Laura has come to thank you," she

said, in a voice of much feeling, as she glanced down upon her small companion, "for what you did for her yesterday."

"I don't want any thanks," I remarked, rather bluntly I am afraid.

"I've promised papa never to go near the water again," volunteered the little lady, in a confidential tone, "when I am by myself."

"Yes, it was very naughty of Miss Laura to go there at all," supplemented the other, in a tone of would-be severity; "she knew quite well that it was wrong."

"I didn't mean to fall in, you know," was the plaintive rejoinder, "only I did *so* want to feed the dear old swans, and so I ran away after dinner and forgot to tell Mason," looking apologetically up at her attendant, "where I was going. But I am sorry," she added, and the little rosebud mouth began to quiver, "because papa says you nearly broke your arm," once more directing her undivided attention to myself, "and I didn't want you to do that."

Here she shook her golden head with an air of great solemnity, and appeared to think she had explained everything in a very satisfactory manner.

"You might have been drowned," observed Mason, who was evidently bent on improving the occasion by impressing upon her youthful charge the full extent of the risk she had run.

"Well—I wasn't, you see—not quite!" was her consolatory rejoinder.

"No; because it fortunately happened that someone was at hand to fly to your assistance—but it's just a miracle," she added significantly, "that *he*," pointing meaningly towards me, "was not drowned, as well as yourself."

Once more the childish mouth showed signs of distress, so I hurriedly interposed.

"*Please* don't talk about it—it's all right now, and I'm so glad."

"*You* are not all right yet," kindly remarked the nurse.

"Couldn't you get up if you tried?" sympathisingly demanded Miss Laura.

"I dare say I could," I answered lightly, "but the doctor won't let me."

"He's a horrid cross man," was the energetic response.

"*Who* is a horrid man?" suddenly demanded another voice; and Mr. Maxwell,

who had entered the room just in time to hear this uncomplimentary speech, glanced rather humorously towards the little lady.

"*You*," she explained, without a moment's hesitation.

"Well, to be sure!" and he lifted his hands with an expression of pretended indignation, "what ingratitude!"

"You made me take nasty medicine yesterday," proceeded his self-constituted judge, with a disapproving gesture, "and now you are keeping this poor boy in bed."

"This poor boy," repeated Mr. Maxwell, in accents of unqualified amusement, "would be a very long time getting well if I were to allow him to move about just at present."

"Of course he would, Miss Laura dear," remonstrated her grave-featured attendant; "and it's not nice of you to speak so disrespectfully to Mr. Maxwell."

"But he *did* give me horrid medicine," excusingly persisted the imperious young lady, "and——"

"Yes, but it was to make you well, and you ought to be very much obliged to him."

"Ought I?" she dubiously rejoined, looking not altogether convinced, even yet, as to

the propriety of permitting herself to subscribe to this new view of the case.

"Of course you ought!" promptly chimed in the doctor, "have I not looked after you all your life, and cured you whenever there was anything the matter with you?"

"Yes, I suppose so," she admitted, after a moment's pause; "but you made me take medicine though," returning to the old grievance.

"To be sure I did, you foolish child! how could I possibly have cured you *without* medicine?" was the wise reply.

"I don't know," she answered, looking somewhat puzzled.

"No, little girls are not expected to know everything," remarked Mr. Maxwell, with a grave shake of his head; and then he proceeded to give his undivided attention to myself.

Most kind and considerate was he during the time I remained an inmate of Mrs. Grimshaw's cottage, doing his very utmost to render my position as little irksome as possible, so that I had good reason to feel grateful to him for all that he did, and looked upon him from henceforth in a very different

light from that in which I had formerly regarded him.

Mr. Vaughan, too, made a point of regularly paying me a visit every day, in the course of which he instituted the most polite inquiries as to the progress I was making towards recovery, and was profuse in his offers of assistance by way of helping the time to pass as pleasantly as could, under the circumstances, be possibly expected.

Books and flowers and fruit were constantly finding their way from the vicarage to my bedside, while as for the soups and jellies and wines, Mrs. Grimshaw laughingly declared it would require quite an army of invalids to consume them all.

"You see, he's a very rich man, my dear," she volunteered one day, when I was well enough to be able to sit up—a fresh inundation of things had just arrived from the "big house," and she was somewhat at a loss, apparently what to do with them—"and he's certainly not by any means wanting in generosity where he takes a fancy; but between ourselves," here she dropped her voice to a mysterious whisper, "he is just as much fit for a clergyman as I am."

I suppose I must have looked the astonishment I felt, for she went on, in an explanatory tone :

"When his elder brother died some twenty years ago, and *he* came in for the family property, everyone expected that he would give up the living ; but no, he did nothing of the kind—he had got accustomed to a clergyman's life he said, and liked it ; but goodness gracious me !" she continued, with a prodigious shake of her head, "he's not a bit my idea of what a clergyman ought to be. He scarcely ever visits anybody in the parish, and when he does, he carries himself with such a high and mighty air, that the poor people would no more think of telling him their troubles than expecting the Queen to listen to them."

"He has been very kind to me since I met with this accident," I ventured to remark, as she came to a sudden pause.

"Well, yes, so he ought to be," she replied, with a curious smile; "he perfectly idolises Miss Laura, and I believe it would have broken his heart if anything had happened to her. She is his only child, you know."

"Is she ?" I exclaimed, feeling very much

interested, as I always did whenever she approached this subject, for the quaint little maiden and myself had by this time become fast friends, and she was quite as much at home in Mrs. Grimshaw's tiny lodge as in the vicarage itself.

"Yes; he lost all his other children in their infancy, and his wife died when Miss Laura was only a few days old, so that *she* has been his companion ever since, and he almost worships her. It is a wonder, indeed, that she is not completely spoiled," added the talkative woman, more to herself than me, "but Mrs. Mason has great influence over her, and uses it in a downright sensible manner."

Here Mrs. Grimshaw's confidences came to an abrupt termination, as the object of her late remarks came breathlessly into the room, bearing in her hands a certain gorgeously bound volume, which she laid down on the table before me with an air of the most intense self-satisfaction, saying complacently:

"There, I promised you I would bring it, and so I have."

"What is it?" I inquired, as I began

mechanically to turn over the pages with my left hand.

"I told you yesterday," she answered, regarding me half reproachfully, as if she considered the question a very unnecessary one.

"Oh yes, I remember," I hastened to assure her; and I could not help smiling somewhat at the decidedly juvenile style of literature in which she expected me to take an interest. My peculiar education, and the constant companionship of so clever a man as Mr. Joyce, had made me far more advanced than most boys years older than myself.

"You don't like it," quickly exclaimed my watchful companion, detecting the smile, and interpreting it after her own fashion.

"Oh, I dare say it is very nice," I replied somewhat lamely; "but the fact is, I have seen it before—years ago."

"Years ago?" she scornfully retorted, with a pout of her pretty lips; "why it is quite *new!*—papa gave it to me only a few days ago."

"Yes, but you see I am so much older than you," I explained, in a tone of semi-apology.

"What does that signify?" she loftily demanded.

"I'm sure I don't know," I replied, quite humbly, "only I suppose boys and girls are different."

"He doesn't care for my book, Mason." cried the little lady, turning with an air of offended dignity to her nurse, who now joined us, having, I suppose, walked with slower and more deliberate footsteps than her young charge; "he says he has seen it before—*years ago!*" such a tone of contempt rang in her voic .

"I told you, my dear, it was too babyish for him," was Mason's soothing reminder.

"*I* am not a baby, and I like it!" quickly retorted the child, who was evidently cut to the heart at my non-appreciation of her own much-prized treasure.

"It was very kind of you to bring it," I said pacifically; "and I am just as much obliged to you as if I had never read it."

"But I don't like old books," she scornfully observed, shutting it up and pushing it away with a sudden change of manner.

"It is new to you," I suggested, pointing

to the immaculate cover, "and I liked it very much at one time."

"Did you?" she rejoined, in a slightly mollified tone, and her glance rested on it with returning complacency.

"I'll read you some of the stories if you can stay to listen to them," I went on, after trying to think of some way by which I might make up to her for the disappointment I had caused her.

"Yes, do," she promptly responded, and she seated herself with the air of a young princess in the little low chair which Mrs. Grimshaw had brought forward for her to occupy; "Mason will be sure to let me stay, won't you?" looking coaxingly up in her nurse's grave face.

"Well, if you will promise to be good, and not disturb Mrs. Grimshaw," she answered, after a pause of consideration.

"Bless her heart! she *never* disturbs me!" exclaimed the good-natured lodge-keeper; "it's just like having a bit of sunshine in the house when she is here."

Privately I quite agreed in this opinion, for of all the sweet, lovable, quaint, tender-hearted, impulsive young maidens that had

ever existed, Laura Vaughan was in my eyes the dearest and the best.

True, my own experience in this respect had been exceedingly limited, and I could not therefore be expected to be a competent judge, but the very fact of my having been the fortunate means of rescuing her from a position of such undoubted peril as that in which I had so lately discovered her made me regard her with a sort of proud proprietorship—a fond protecting kind of friendship, mingled largely with the deepest admiration, and that chivalrous respect which even a boy is capable of entertaining towards the object of his youthful predilection, whether that object happens to be worthy of all the romantic devotion thus richly bestowed upon it or not.

CHAPTER IV.

RECOVERY.

"Words are but poor interpreters in the realms of emotion."

"The parents love the love that is old,
And the children the love that is new."

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

In point of education, Miss Vaughan was not what might be called "advanced." On the contrary, she could do little more than read when I had the honour of first making her acquaintance, and even that was not well done, while as for her spelling, it was simply absurd, words of three letters being about as much as she could manage.

Mason accounted for the young lady's backwardness by explaining that the vicar had been so fearful of injuring his darling's health by over-study, that he had purposely gone to the other extreme, and set his face against having her taught anything except such simple things as she could understand without any effort.

As a natural consequence she was, although really very clever and intelligent in point of ability, decidedly below par when contrasted with other girls of her own age and position, and she was just beginning to realise this herself, and quite ready to take the law into her own hands with regard to the future development of her intellectual powers.

I think the first thing that had the effect of directing her attention to her own educational deficiencies was observing the difference which existed between herself and some cousins of hers who happened about this time to be staying in the neighbourhood of Saltsea for the benefit of their mother's health ; and when she discovered how much more they knew than she did, how far advanced they were in all sorts of studies of which she had not even been taught the

rudiments, her childish pride instantly came to the front, and she declared her intention of forthwith going to school!

This was a step, however, which her anxious father would not for a moment countenance; but he so far fell in with her suggestions as to engage a really superior governess to superintend his daughter's future studies; and at the time when I found myself *hors de combat* in Mrs. Grimshaw's cottage, the imperious little lady was looking forward with undisguised impatience to the arrival of this important personage, who was to be permitted the privilege of initiating her into all those mysteries of learning with which she was herself so keenly anxious to be made acquainted.

It was quite easy to see, by the way in which Mason alluded to the new *régime* which was about to be established at the vicarage, that *she* was by no means a sharer in Miss Laura's rhapsodies. She appeared to have a sort of presentiment that her own sway was almost over, and that the newcomer would, ere long, succeed in obtaining that place in the young lady's affection which had hitherto been occupied entirely by herself.

Miss Vaughan, an elderly step-sister of the vicar's, who had come to rule his house for him when he first lost his wife, and had at his special request remained with them ever since, never interfered in the slightest degree with any of Mason's arrangements, (all this I heard of course from my gossip-loving hostess) being only too glad to save herself the responsibility of being answerable for the safety and well-being of so precious a charge. She was a timid unobtrusive woman, with rather a cold and reserved manner, but thoroughly refined and lady-like, full of admiration and respect for her brother, and a sort of reverential tenderness for the clever, impulsive, and affectionate child who was the object of his own almost idolatrous devotion.

Up to the present time, therefore, Mason had reigned supreme so far as her youthful charge was concerned ; and it was, I suppose, only natural that she should have had some misgivings at the idea of her own influence being weakened, and a total stranger preferred perhaps to herself.

For she had quite sufficient sense to recognise the fact that knowledge is power, and

was perfectly aware that Miss Laura entertained the most profound respect for clever people, and would probably be inclined from the very first to look upon this highly educated person who was about to enter upon the scenes in the capacity of instructress to her individual self with decided interest, and allow herself to be influenced by her wishes without any further reference to the opinions of her quondam nurse.

Not that Mason was naturally what might be termed a jealous or small-minded woman, but her affection for her nursling was so intense and appropriative that she hated the thought of anyone coming between them, and showed herself in this one instance somewhat to a disadvantage in consequence.

Even Mrs. Grimshaw noticed the cloud which always came over her face whenever Miss Vaughan alluded to the new governess, and in her homely good-natured way essayed to comfort her, by reminding her that sooner or later something of the kind must have happened, and that there was no use therefore in troubling about what could not be helped.

"She's coming to-day," gleefully announced

Miss Laura, as she unceremoniously entered the little lodge parlour one morning, and from the suppresed excitement of her manner, coupled with the more than usual gloom and taciturnity of Mason, I had no difficulty in understanding to whom she alluded.

"You seem very glad," I answered vaguely, not knowing what else to say.

"Of course I'm glad," she retorted earnestly.

"Perhaps you may tell a different story when you've seen a little more of her," glumly observed her dejected-looking attendant.

"Poor old Mason!" was the condescending reply, accompanied by a glance of superior wisdom, "she fancies I shan't care about her any more, but that's all nonsense, you know," turning towards me with a sort of confidential movement.

"Yes, I am sure you would never forsake old friends for new," I meekly responded.

"Of course not," with a scornful toss of the golden head; "I told Mason so, but she's very stupid;" here she patted the other's hand with a kind of lofty superiority which brought something like a smile to the grave

features, and made her answer, in rather a more cheerful tone, "Well, we shall see."

"Yes, we shall see," acquiesced the young lady, in her childishly-dignified voice, and then she politely turned her attention to myself, and inquired whether I was "nearly well?"

"Yes, thank you; I am going to-morrow," I replied, glancing down at my arm, which I now carried in a sling; "Mr. Maxwell is going to call for me himself," I added, "and take me in his carriage."

"I'm sorry you are going, boy," she always called me *boy,* and coming from her lips I did not at all object to the appellation; "we shall miss you, shan't we, Mason?"

"Yes," assented the latter, eyeing me kindly; "I am sure we shall."

"I suppose you couldn't come and see me after I go home?" I hesitatingly suggested; a sudden sinking of heart taking possession of me as it all at once flashed across me how much I should miss *her* bright sunshiny presence.

"Yes, we could," quickly exclaimed my energetic visitor; "at least, I think so," turning inquiringly towards Mason.

"You will have to ask Miss Belmont's leave," was the dry reminder; "*I* shall be nobody you know, when once *she* is in the house."

"You dear old jealous darling! I shan't like her half as much as I do you," soothingly remarked the child; "but I shall have to what papa calls 'respect her,' because she's so clever."

She finished up with a merry laugh, and even Mason's grave face relaxed into an answering smile.

"You will have to take your walks with *her* now, you see," she explained, after a moment's pause.

"Oh, I dare say she'll often let me go with you," was the careless reply, "and we will call and see that nice Mr. Joyce, and find out how the boy gets on."

"I hope you will," I answered quickly.

"And I shall see you in church, you know," she continued re-assuringly; "I know where you sit—Mason showed me the other day."

"Did she?" I exclaimed somewhat eagerly, and I smiled to myself as I remembered how often I had watched her restless little form

from afar, as she vainly strove to maintain a decorously solemn deportment.

"What are you laughing at?" she imperiously demanded; she was always quick to detect the slightest change in her companions' countenances, and I could not help sometimes being lost in amaze at her penetration in discovering just what I was thinking about.

"Nothing," I evasively rejoined; "I was only wondering whether you did not find it very difficult at times to sit still."

"Do *you?*" she gravely inquired.

"Oh no, but then I am older, and not so fond of moving about as you are."

"But I do behave well in church, don't I, Mason?" looking appealingly at her attendant.

"Yes—very fairly," was her somewhat qualified rejoinder; "it's a long service," she added excusingly.

"And papa's sermons are very dry," candidly supplemented the little lady, with a serious shake of the golden head. "I don't care about *them* one bit—do you?" turning sharply round upon me.

"Oh, I don't know—I never thought," I

stammered rather incoherently; it was not easy to give an ambiguous answer with those gravely inquiring violet orbs riveted eagerly upon one's face.

"Then you ought to think," she promptly rejoined; "you don't go to sleep, do you?" this was added with a sudden suspicion.

"No," I replied, feeling slightly scandalised at the question.

"Some boys do, though," she condescended to explain; "for I've seen them, and men and women too!" this was said in a low confidential tone, as if it was an admission which she scarcely liked making.

"Perhaps if you had to work hard all the week you might feel sleepy too," reprovingly interposed Mason.

"Don't they sleep at night then?" innocently demanded Miss Laura, opening her eyes with an expression of utter astonishment.

"Well, for the matter of that I dare say they are often disturbed," replied the other, smiling a little at the unexpected question; "poor people have a great many troubles to put up with that you know nothing about."

The young lady's face took a serious

reflective expression at this new view of the case, and she seemed, judging from her silence, to be pondering the matter in her own mind.

Presently she changed the subject, by graciously announcing to me her intention of paying me another visit before I should leave Mrs. Grimshaw's cottage the following morning.

Which promise she duly kept, making her welcome appearance upon the scene just half-an-hour before I started.

She was accompanied by the new governess, a tall dignified-looking, middle-aged personage, who wore spectacles, and dressed in what seemed to my boyish understanding rather a peculiar fashion; she had a kind, though decidedly plain face, and a pleasant smile, so that altogether I did not think Mrs. Mason's gloomy forebodings with regard to her own future prospects were likely to be realised.

She fixed her spectacled eyes upon me with a look of considerable interest as her impulsive companion rushed forward in her usual unceremonious way, and holding out her tiny hand, said, in a half mysterious whisper—

"Here she is, boy! I knew you would like to see her."

Then, turning with a little air of dignity towards her governess, she called her particular attention to me, by explaining gravely—

"He's not quite well, you know, even yet—papa told me so yesterday; only Mrs. Joyce is so dull without him, he must go home."

"Miss Vaughan is very sorry to lose you, I think," observed the lady, in a low musical voice.

"Yes, she has been very kind," I answered, fixing my eyes upon the fair sweet face which I had grown to love so well.

"Nay, she tells me that it is *you* who have been kind to her," was the significant reply.

"Yes," chimed in her communicative young charge, "he's read me heaps of stories, and told me about all sorts of curious things, and then," she added, with a sober little smile, "he saved me from being quite drowned in the lake."

"Yes, I have heard of that," responded Miss Belmont, bestowing on me a glance of the most flattering approval; "and I am glad

to make the acquaintance of so brave a boy."

"Indeed, I am not brave," was my eager disclaimer; "I just did it on the spur of the moment, and my father—Mr. Joyce I mean —has often told me that impulse and real courage are two different things."

"There, Miss Belmont, that's just the way he talks," exclaimed the little Laura; "isn't he a funny boy?"

I felt my face flush somewhat at this doubtful compliment—although I was well aware that she did not mean it as such—but Miss Belmont's next words served to put me at ease again, and made me look upon her almost as a friend, so thoroughly did she seem to enter into my meaning.

"I quite understand the distinction," she said, with a thoughtful sympathising smile; "and I can well believe that so far as your own feelings are concerned you would rather not be praised for what you did. Under the circumstances," she went on, speaking slowly and interrogatively, "I dare say it seemed to you at the moment the only thing to be done!"

"Yes," I earnestly assented, "it was not

as if I had had time to reflect on the consequences, or even to make up my mind as to whether there was a chance of my being able to save her!"

Here I paused, and looked with something like embarrassment at the blooming young maiden who had been in such deadly peril, and a slight shiver ran through my frame at the remembrance of the risk I had run.

"I know just what you mean," gently observed Miss Belmont; "but unless I am greatly mistaken in your character you would have acted precisely the same, even if you *had* reflected."

"Do you think so?" I replied, with mingled diffidence and gratification.

There was something about her which made me feel that she was thoroughly to be trusted, and I instinctively recognised the fact that she would never stoop to utter a falsehood, or be guilty of insincerity, either in word or deed.

She had only time to answer my question with a re-assuring monosyllable, before Mr. Maxwell's voice was heard outside the lodge door, inquiring for me; and after taking a hasty leave of the little party, which now

included Mrs. Grimshaw and her good-natured husband, I found myself seated beside the doctor in the low hooded phaeton which he used both winter and summer, and in less than a quarter of an hour I was comfortably installed in Mr. Joyce's easy chair in my own cottage home, answering his anxious wife's questions as to the present state of my feelings, and looking around me upon each familiar object with a certain sense of complacency and satisfaction, such as I had for some time past been a stranger to.

"I am so glad to be home again, mother," I said, when I felt her kind arms thrown around me, and marked the unusual agitation of her manner.

"You can't be more glad to come back than we are to have you, my dear Charlie," she answered, hastily wiping her eyes; "I cannot tell you how we have missed you."

"How is father's cough?" I somewhat anxiously inquired; the last time he came to see me I had noticed that he seemed to be suffering from one of his old attacks.

"Oh, it's much about the same," she

replied, in a consolatory tone, "no better, I think, but certainly not worse."

"He will soon be home to dinner," I remarked, glancing impatiently at the clock.

"Yes, he won't let the grass grow under his feet, you may be sure," was the half-laughing rejoinder; "he has been looking forward so to have you back again," and after giving me another warm kiss, Mrs. Joyce bustled off to see that the mid-day meal was being properly prepared.

As soon as the door had closed upon her I rose from my seat and went to the window, where I remained, eagerly watching each passer-by, until at last I caught a distant glimpse of the well-known form of my dear and best beloved friend.

He raised his eyes as he approached, and quickened his pace on getting sight of me; but before he could reach the house I had gone out into the little garden to meet him, and the earnestness and fervour with which he wrung my hand, the unmistakable delight with which he welcomed me back again, and the kindness and affection which beamed from his delicate and refined face, brought a

glow of unutterable pleasure to my own heart, and a sort of choking sensation to my throat, which prevented me from responding to his greeting in any but a silent fashion.

There existed between us, however, such thorough *rapprochement*, that words were not needed to make our mutual sentiments known to each other.

A look or smile was quite enough to reveal all that was necessary to be known, and never once during my whole intercourse with this good, unselfish, noble-hearted man, was there even the shadow of a cloud or misunderstanding between us.

How I loved and reverenced him, I fear I could never hope to make my readers understand, for it seems strange and mysterious even to myself that I, a mere stripling, and one, moreover, in no wise related to him, should have had so perfect an affinity with a character like his; that two such, in many respects, totally opposite natures, should have thus been brought to assimilate despite the additional disparity in point of age; that he should have succeeded sometimes, as it were, by descending to my youthful level, sometimes by raising me to his own, in com-

pletely breaking down those natural barriers which so often exist between the boy and the man, preventing them from holding any *bona fide* heart-to-heart communion; but so it was, and I rejoiced in the knowledge of this thorough oneness, this reciprocity of thought and feeling, which made me gratefully conscious that if I had been his son fifty times over I could not have been more to him than I really was, neither could my own affection, on the other hand, have been characterised by a particle more warmth and fervour than that which I entertained for the man who had acted towards me a parent's part, and never by word or look reminded me of the little real claim I had upon him, or hinted even that there was anything at all out of the common in the fact of his thus caring for a waif and stray of whose antecedents he literally *knew* nothing, and who was, properly speaking, of no practical use to him, but, on the contrary, a very decided expense and responsibility, to make no mention of the infinitude of trouble he must have taken with my early education, so anxious was he that I should be thoroughly grounded in those particular branches of

study in which he was himself so deeply interested, and so admirably qualified by his own proficiency to undertake the part of guide and instructor.

CHAPTER V.

BEREFT.

"The true nobility of worth;
The aristocracy of gentleness,
The power of goodness and of doing good."

"They sleep.
I name no names; instinctively I feel
Each at some well-remembered grave will kneel,
And from the inscription wipe the weeds and moss,
For every heart best knoweth its own loss."

Another year soon slipped away, during which I became, if possible, even more absorbingly attached to my so-called father than before.

Many were the delightful and improving conversations we held; many the long country walks we took, many the pleasant confidences we exchanged; and the older I grew, the more I seemed to love and revere

and appreciate his worth, enter into the beauty and excellence of his character, and understand that innate refinement of mind and heart which raised him, in my estimation at least, to a far higher level than that which was occupied by any one else.

I had the satisfaction of knowing, too, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that my own affection for him was returned with equal warmth and tenderness by himself.

I was his one joy—he often told me so. In watching the growth and development of my mental and moral faculties he experienced an intense and appropriating personal satisfaction, not easily to be described or understood by outsiders, not even half comprehended by his placid and good-natured wife, whose own somewhat limited resources in the matter of mind and intellect quite unfitted her fully to grasp the working of so highly cultivated a nature as his, or give him credit even for that lofty superiority and exquisite nobleness of spirit which he manifested at every turn—almost making me wonder sometimes, in my own mind, at the vast difference which seemed to exist between himself and other people, and

speculate as to the cause, while I involuntarily contrasted his unworldly straightforward conduct, his gentle unassuming manner, and the far-away *spirituel* expression of his delicate features, with the rest of the Saltsea inhabitants, not even excepting Mr. Vaughan, who was, in virtue of his kindness and attention to myself, invested with a sort of halo of romance, and looked upon in quite a different light to that in which I regarded the generality of those with whom I was occasionally brought in contact.

One year! how much may be compressed into it! how many serious events may happen; and yet how short it seems to look back upon; how rapid and imperceptible its flight.

Alas for me! it was my last perfectly happy one for many a day; and at its close, the current of my life was rudely disturbed, my fair illusions dispelled, and I awoke to the consciousness that there were such things as sorrow, and suffering, and weeping, and trouble, and bereavement—even for me.

Yes, he died, my dear and idolised friend, almost before I had realised the fact that he

was really ill. A short and sharp attack of inflammation of the lungs carried him off, and I felt stunned and bewildered, oppressed with a kind of dumb despair, of mute agony, which seemed to paralyse my faculties, and made me experience for the first time in my short life that I was desolate and forsaken.

After the first shock which succeeded this great and irreparable loss, Mrs. Joyce seemed to accept her fate with a kind of gentle resignation which astonished me not a little.

She had, in fact, no capacity for any intense suffering or enjoyment, consequently she was spared much. Still, she certainly felt her husband's death—how, indeed, could it be otherwise?—missed his tender, loving companionship, and tearfully regretted the lonely widowed life which she was from henceforth doomed to lead.

So far as worldly circumstances went she was on the whole very comfortably provided for.

Her wants were few, and living at Saltsea was by no means dear; so that she did not suffer much in a pecuniary way from her husband's loss.

The little cottage, too, in which we lived had been purchased by Mr. Joyce some years previously, so that she had no rent to pay, and in addition to the modest competence which the late schoolmaster had left her, she was presented with rather a handsome testimonial after his death as a mark of the estimation in which he was generally held in the neighbourhood, and the sorrow which was universally felt at his abrupt removal from their midst.

In course of time a new schoolmaster was appointed, and the recently made widow kindly proposed that I should pursue my interrupted studies under his personal supervision.

To this arrangement I demurred ; for, truth to tell, not only did I shrink most painfully from seeing another, as it were, occupying a position which my more than father had hitherto held, but the little I had as yet seen of his successor inspired me with an unaccountable feeling of repulsion, and made me instinctively wish to keep as much aloof from him as possible.

I could not exactly explain the cause of my aversion, but I appeared so unmistakably

reluctant to avail myself of his services, that easy-going Mrs. Joyce did not at first insist on my doing so.

For a while, therefore, I was left pretty much to my own devices—spent my time how and where I liked, and pursued, as far as I could do so, the same routine as that which I had been accustomed to follow during the lifetime of my dearly loved friend and preceptor.

One Saturday afternoon, however—how well I remember it!—on returning from a long stroll which I had been taking upon the sea shore, vainly striving to forget my sorrow, I found the new schoolmaster sitting in Mrs. Joyce's little parlour engaged in an apparently interesting and confidential conversation with her.

She was looking unusually animated, and there was a gratified self-complacent smile upon her lips as I entered, which seemed to indicate that her companion had been most successful, not only in putting her at her ease, but also in ingratiating himself with her, and making her regard him with a very decided feeling of satisfaction and friendly respect.

Mr. Green—such was the new pedagogue's name—judging from his appearance, must have been about thirty years of age.

He was moderately tall, and rather inclined to corpulence; his eyes were of a greenish blue, his hair and whiskers of a reddish tinge; his complexion florid, his mouth large, and coarse, and—well, cruel.

His manner, however, could be both bland and insinuating, and there was a determination of character about him, a kind of dogged persistency, together with a firm and resolute will, which suggested the idea that he would never fail to carry his point or accomplish his purpose, no matter how strong the opposition might be, or apparently insurmountable the difficulties.

In my own case I had a proof of this; for one short half hour spent in his society had sufficed most effectually to turn Mrs. Joyce's head, and make her alter her opinion as to what would be the most advisable course to be adopted with regard to my studies.

On the morning of this very day she had agreed with me that I could not do better than go on as I had begun; the admirable

instruction I had already received having, as was only natural and to be expected under the circumstances, placed me on quite a different level to that occupied by most boys of my age, and rendered me comparatively independent of any extraneous assistance in the way of prosecuting those intellectual researches which had been commenced under such wise and loving auspices.

Now, she announced in the quietest and most matter-of-fact manner that she had decided on putting me into Mr. Green's hands for the future, and that he was coming to give me my first lesson the following Monday.

"But, mother," I ventured to say, remonstratingly, conscious all the time that the schoolmaster's blue-green eyes were riveted keenly and searchingly upon my face, "I thought you told me this morning that I might go on teaching myself."

"So I did, my dear," she answered promptly. "but Mr. Green says it would be a thousand pities for a lad with your abilities to be thrown entirely upon your own resources; and as your poor father," a look of gravity suddenly overspreading her coun-

tenance, "never could bear the idea of your going to the school, he," glancing with evident respect at her visitor, "has kindly consented to come here for an hour every evening instead."

"It will give me great pleasure, I am sure," chimed in Mr. Green; "it's not often one gets the chance of directing the studies of so clever and painstaking a pupil as Master Charlie seems to be!" and he laughed facetiously.

"No, indeed," assented kind-hearted simple Mrs. Joyce, who received the compliment quite literally; "my poor dear husband often used to say the same."

"Ah! we should have been kindred spirits," replied Mr. Green, with a sympathetic shake of the head; "how grieved I am that I never happened to meet him."

Kindred spirits! I felt my face flush hotly, while a perfect whirl of contending emotions awoke within me at the man's audacity.

How *dare* he compare himself for an instant with his gentle, refined, delicately-organised, intellectually-minded predecessor —*he*, with his grossness and animalism, his commonplace intelligence, his unprepossessing

appearance, and false, insincere manner! I was absolutely aghast at his presumption, and almost without intending it, I turned apprehensively round upon Mrs. Joyce, fully expecting to find her as much annoyed as myself.

But no; there was no trace of displeasure upon her countenance; only a kind of melancholy satisfaction, as if she rather approved than otherwise of her visitor's sentiments.

This being so, I had of course no right to interfere; but it is not always easy to keep one's looks under control, and unless I am greatly mistaken, Mr. Green read something in my face which he did not altogether like.

Indeed, I am quite sure of it; for when he shortly afterwards proceeded to take his departure, there was a strangely vindictive expression in the greenish blue eyes as they met my own, which told me, plainly as any words could have done, that he had both noticed and resented my indignation, and that, whether he should think proper to revert to the subject or not on any future occasion, he would at all events remember

what had occurred, and probably punish me for it, if he could.

Not a moment's anxiety did this latter consideration cost me—I was too thoroughly absorbed in meditating over what I had heard, and wondering whether there would be the least use in trying to persuade Mrs. Joyce to regard him in the same unfavourable light as I did myself.

A strange sinking of heart had suddenly seized me—a gloomy presentiment that in some mysterious way or other this Mr. Green's influence would prove inimical to our joint happiness.

That he had some purely personal motive for thus voluntarily charging himself with the education of a lad who so evidently failed to appreciate the honour, and would have preferred being left alone, I could not for an instant doubt, though what that motive was it would have been very difficult to comprehend.

Several times before the much-dreaded Monday arrived, I tried to shake Mrs. Joyce's resolve, and get her to alter her plans, but she always shook her head and said something about its being for my own

good, and that it would be cruel kindness were she to deprive me of the opportunity of benefiting by Mr. Green's valuable assistance.

I had nothing to do, therefore, but to submit; and for the first week or two my new preceptor was indefatigable in his attentions, and most anxious, apparently, to produce a satisfactory impression upon my mind as well as that of Mrs. Joyce.

In the one case he certainly did not succeed, for the more I saw of him, the less I liked him; but so far as the widow was concerned, he somehow contrived to throw a kind of spell around her, which made her look upon all he said and did in a partial and prejudiced light, and prevented her from seeing any flaws in his character or suspecting him of anything like insincerity or deceit.

I soon discovered, to my mystification and dismay, that Mr. Green did not confine his visits to the stipulated hour which he had himself agreed upon for superintending my studies, but he was constantly making his appearance, sometimes with one excuse, sometimes with another, until at last he got into the way of dropping in without any

excuse at all; and whenever he came he was always well received by Mrs. Joyce, and as time passed on she seemed completely infatuated by him.

He flattered and made much of her; lost no opportunity of paying her a compliment, and putting her on good terms with herself; and not being sufficiently clever to distinguish the false from the true, she accepted all his attentions with a pleased and self-satisfied spirit, and gave him credit for qualifications which he never possessed.

On one or two occasions I spoke out and told my poor deluded mother just what I thought of him; but I might just as well have spoken to the winds for all the effect my words had upon her.

She only laughed and reminded me that I was but a boy, and could not, therefore, be expected to understand a character like his.

"He is a good man, Charlie," she observed rather sharply one day, when I had ventured to express my own doubts on the subject, "and has *such* a respect for my poor dear husband."

"Oh, mother, don't trust him," I exclaimed, with very unusual energy.

"I cannot imagine why you should have taken such a dislike to him," she answered, eyeing me in manifest perplexity, "especially when he is so kind to yourself."

"Kind!" I scornfully repeated. "I would much rather he was *not* kind, for I often feel as if I positively hated him."

"My dear Charlie, you surely do not know what you are saying," replied Mrs. Joyce, with a half scared expression; "it is very wicked of you to talk of hating anyone."

"It may be wicked, but I cannot help it," I doggedly responded.

"Such pains, too, as he takes with your lessons," she went on, in mildly reproachful tones.

"Well, as to that, I very much question whether he knows any more than I do myself," I muttered, not so low but what she could hear it.

For a minute or two she remained staring at me in silent amazement, the presumption of this last assertion having apparently struck her dumb.

Then she recovered herself somewhat, and proceeded gently to take me to task (even in her most excited moments she could never be

anything but gentle) for venturing to speak in such disrespectful terms of one for whom I ought to entertain the profoundest esteem; and it ended at length, in this instance as well as on other similar occasions, in my being, if not convinced, yet—for the time being at least—*silenced!*

To anyone who did not know the peculiar nature of the education I had already received, the intense care and pains which Mr. Joyce had expended upon me, and the natural avidity with which I had taken in everything he chose to teach me, it might have seemed nothing more or less than inexcusable conceit on my part, thus presuming to pass an opinion upon the qualifications of the new schoolmaster.

But it was not for nothing that I had been the chosen friend and companion of so clever and intelligent a man as my so-called father had been; and in thought and mind I was far more advanced than other lads much older than myself.

I mention this little fact merely in extenuation of my apparent presumption in venturing to question Mr. Green's fitness for the post he at present held, and also to

account to my readers for my own general unyouthfulness in various other ways.

I had never associated with boys of my own age, never joined in their sports, or compared notes with them on any one subject: it was not, therefore, surprising that I should have developed into a decidedly precocious lad, looking upon things in an altogether different light to what I might, under other circumstances, have done; and being—well, it is only the truth—far more capable in consequence of judging as to the mental abilities of other people.

If Mr. Green had not had quite so exalted an opinion of himself, and everything that he did, he must have seen how thorough a contempt I had for his so-called learning; but there was too much pride and conceit about him, mingled with a kind of disagreeable arrogance, and a harsh and domineering spirit, to make him at all likely to suspect anything of the kind; and, much as I despised him, I forced myself to treat him with outward civility when I discovered how infatuated my poor easy-going, kind-hearted, weak-minded mother was with regard to him, and how utterly useless it was

for me to try to shake her faith in him, or get her to look upon his character in its true colours.

What I suffered when I saw her gradually getting into his toils, no tongue could express.

Sometimes I felt as if I must by sheer strength of will succeed in opening her eyes to the truth; then I became hopeless and despairing, as I noticed the frequency and significance of his visits, and the little flutter of pleasurable excitement into which she was thrown by his flatteries—flatteries which a stronger and cleverer woman than herself would have estimated at their real value, and probably rejected with scorn.

One thing particularly struck me, which was that Mr. Green always seemed ill-at-ease and uncomfortable whenever I happened to be present during these visits, and many were the excuses he made to try and persuade me to leave them together.

As far as I could do so, however, without absolute rudeness, I turned a deaf ear to his suggestions in this respect, and was pleased and relieved to find that although I had not got it in my power to put a stop to his

attentions, or prevent him from spending every spare moment with my poor deluded mother, I was yet able to exercise a certain restraining influence over his movements, and act as a sort of protection to herself.

But one unfortunate morning I rose from my bed with the most extraordinary feelings. One moment I was burning hot, the next I shivered with cold, while my head ached fearfully, and a choking sensation in my throat made me miserably conscious that something very unusual was about to happen —that I must, in short, be going to have an illness.

When Mrs. Joyce saw me she gave utterance to an exclamation of consternation and dismay, and then helped me to return to my bed, after which she sent off to fetch the doctor.

He pronounced it to be an attack of scarlet fever, which happened just then to be prevalent in the neighbourhood, and for the next month I was confined to my own room, and obliged, in spite of myself, to allow matters to take their course with regard to Mr. Green's future prospects.

I believe I should have got well much

sooner than I did, had I not been so worried about my mother, but knowing the weak side of her character, and how totally unfitted she was to cope with a determined unscrupulous man, such as I fully believed the new schoolmaster to be, I could not help feeling dreadfully alarmed lest she should be led away by his hypocritical professions of friendship and fulsome compliments, and consign her happiness into his keeping—in which case she would, I greatly feared, soon discover her mistake, and bitterly regret the unadvised step she had taken, when it might alas! be too late to remedy the evil, or bring back comfort and pleasure to her hitherto peaceful and united home.

CHAPTER VI.

CHANGES.

"But yet she listen'd—'tis enough,
Who listens once will listen twice."

"Thus he cried,
Easing the pressure of his burthened heart,
With passionate prayer; thus pour'd his spirit forth,
Till the long effort had exhausted him,
His spirit fail'd."

When I at length recovered from my illness, I found my fears all verified. Mr. Green had done his work well; not only persuading poor Mrs. Joyce into the belief that he was one of the best and noblest of men, and that it was consequently a great honour to find herself thus singled out as the sole object of his affection and regard, but also that she, in her turn, was most devotedly attached to

himself, and that life without him would from henceforth be unendurable!

She did not all at once take me into her full confidence; but I had previously seen and heard quite enough to show me pretty accurately how matters stood between them; and when she at last poured out her story into my unwilling ears, and tried to persuade me into the belief that she was doing a very wise thing in thus consenting to marry Mr. Green, I was not by any means surprised either at the news itself, or the strangely complacent way in which she alluded to this contemplated change in her prospects.

I suppose my face must have expressed more grief and despair than I was at the moment aware of, for she suddenly interrupted herself in the middle of a sentence about her own happiness in having won the love of so good and clever a man as Mr. Green, and laying her hand kindly upon my shoulder, she leant forward, and kissed me very affectionately, saying, in a voice of much emotion:

"What makes you look like that, Charlie? Are you not glad to see me happy once more?"

"Ah! if I only thought you *would* be happy!" I could not help exclaiming; "but oh, mother! have you considered the matter well?—it will be too late by-and-by, you know;" and I gazed imploringly into her face.

"My dear boy, of course I have!" she said, in reply to my question, and there was rather an annoyed inflexion in her voice; "I have thought of everything—even you!" Here she took my hand in hers and smiled.

"Never mind me," I hastily replied.

"But I do mind you, dear," she interrupted, in a kind voice, "it is my duty to mind you; and if I thought that this marriage would do you harm, I would break it off even now. But I am quite sure," she went on cheerfully, without giving me an opportunity of speaking, "it is the very best thing I can do for you as well as myself; Mr. Green will be the greatest possible assistance to you, and do for you far more than I could ever have done."

"Oh, mother!" I groaned, in the bitterness of my spirit; "is it possible that you can have forgotten *him*," my trembling lips could scarcely pronounce the word, "*already?*"

"Forgotten! of course not," she answered, rather confusedly; "people don't so soon forget; and Francis" (Mr. Green), "has no dislike whatever to my talking about him."

"But has it ever occurred to you," I asked, making an effort to speak calmly, for now that the ice was broken between us, I thought I would take the opportunity of setting matters before her in a plain and practical light, so that she should not enter upon so serious a step with her eyes shut to the possible difficulties of her new position; "has it ever occurred to you, mother, that Mr. Green's character is a very different one from *his*; and—I don't like saying it, but please let me tell you what I really think, just this once—instead of having your own way, as you have always hitherto had, you will find when you are married that your husband will be your master. I am sure of it," I added hurriedly, as she was about to interrupt me, "and if you do not carry out his wishes in everything, he will probably be cruel to you, for he is quite capable of it—he has a cruel mouth, and would not hesitate to ill-treat you!"

Poor Mrs. Joyce sat staring at me in

absolute amazement as I poured out these incoherent words, and the colour flushed over her face as she answered, after a momentary pause :

"You surely must be raving, Charlie—cruel, indeed ! and he so fond of me !"

I shook my head gloomily, but made no other response ; and she went on presently, in rather an aggrieved tone :

"You see, you never did like Mr. Green, and cannot therefore do him justice."

"If you really and truly marry him, I will do my very best to treat him with the respect due to your husband," I returned, in a grave, sorrowful voice ; "but oh ! I would give the world if you had never met him !"

"It is useless talking of that now," was the hasty reply. "Everything is settled ; and in another week or two he will be my husband."

"So soon ?" I despairingly ejaculated.

"We shall continue to live here," proceeded Mrs. Joyce, looking complacently round the tidy little sitting-room.

"Ah, yes ; I suppose so," I answered chokingly.

"And you must just cheer up and make

the best of things," she went on, encouragingly; "and I dare say after a while you will be able to appreciate him better."

Privately I very much doubted whether I should ever be able, with all my efforts, to regard her future husband with anything but simple detestation. There was no use in telling her this, however, so I held my peace, not wishing to render her more uncomfortable than I could help; and yet, at the same time, miserably conscious that whatever she might say and think to the contrary, my instincts had not deceived me, and that sooner or later she would rue the day when she had consented to become Francis Green's wife.

"I hope you are not jealous, Charlie!" suddenly exclaimed my companion, in the tone of one who has quite unexpectedly arrived at the solution of a difficult problem; "you surely do not think that I shall love *you* less because I have made up my mind to marry again?"

"It is not myself I am troubling about," I answered sadly; "I could go away, you know, and get my own living if it seemed desirable, or if Mr. Green ill-treated me; but

in your case it will be so different; whatever he might do, you would be bound as his wife to put up with it."

"Stuff and nonsense, my dear, you really do not know what you are talking about!" was the quick retort; "your illness has made you morbid."

"I'm afraid my illness has nothing to say to it," I replied, with the air of one who feels he has utterly failed in accomplishing his purpose; "but I suppose, under the circumstances, I had better say no more on the subject, and I can only hope"—I added this as gently and affectionately as I could—"that you may be happy!"

Then I went up to her and kissed her, feeling all the time as if my own heart was breaking, so sad and sorrowful was I at the idea of seeing the place so lately occupied by her sainted husband, whom I had loved and reverenced and esteemed almost from my infancy, and looked upon as little short of perfection, appropriated by a man who was not, in my opinion at least, worthy to be mentioned even in connection with him.

I never thought of actually *blaming* Mrs. Joyce for thus contemplating a second

marriage, although I wondered most profoundly at the extreme bad taste which could lead her to be satisfied with a man so unmistakably inferior in mind, manner, and appearance to what her first husband had been.

How could she, I bitterly asked myself, tolerate the coarse-minded Mr. Green for a single moment, after having been accustomed for so many years to hold the closest and most loving intercourse with so gentle and refined a spirit as that which had characterised her first husband? It was utterly incredible to me how any woman in the full possession of her senses could deliberately make up her mind to act as she was doing; and yet I knew how thoroughly well-meaning she was, how kind and unselfish in many ways, and how utterly incapable of conniving at anything like wickedness or deceit.

It must, I at last decided, be nothing more or less than a case of sheer infatuation. Mr. Green, with his specious manner and civil flowery speeches, having contrived to throw a glamour over her, inducing her to regard him not as he really was, but as he ought to have been, and give him credit for excellen-

cies which had never belonged to him—investing him, in fact, with all those mental and moral qualifications which had belonged in so eminent a degree to the late Mr. Joyce, who was as utterly unlike her present admirer as light is from darkness.

Mingling with my affection there was from henceforth a kind of half contemptuous pity for the woman who could so easily mistake the false for the true, and having once known what real sterling worth was, could thus complacently content herself with its counterfeit.

Still, I was particularly careful not to allow her to suspect that any such change had taken place in my feelings, and I made up my mind that for the sake of the past, and all that she had done for me, I would try by every means in my power to crush out of my heart all those bitter and vindictive thoughts which I had hitherto rather encouraged than otherwise, with regard to the man who was so soon to become her husband.

Accordingly I met him when next he made his appearance in our midst in a very different spirit to that which I had formerly manifested toward him, and I could see by

the sudden dilating of the greenish blue eyes, and the peculiar smile which came to the cruel mouth, that he perfectly comprehended what had happened, and rather enjoyed the thought of my discomfiture.

His words, however, when he spoke, were quite sufficiently civil to justify Mrs. Joyce in the significantly triumphant glance which she directed towards me, as if to call my attention to the fact that, however I might abuse him, he, at any rate, was kindly disposed towards myself; but I understood quite well what it all meant, and knew that although he might, for reasons of his own, pretend just then to treat me with apparent courtesy and politeness, it was by no means a sign that he cared for me any more than I did for himself.

And yet he exerted himself more than I had ever known him do before to be a pleasant and agreeable companion; inquired with an air of the greatest solicitude after my health, called Mrs. Joyce's attention to the fact of my having grown very considerably during my late illness, and facetiously remarked that if I continued to make such rapid progress in this respect I should very

soon attain to man's estate—an observation which his matronly *fiancée* responded to with the utmost seriousness; and then the conversation took another and more general turn, until at length I made an excuse for leaving them, and retired to my own room to reflect over this new phase in my history, and try to become accustomed to the idea of seeing Mr. Green formally installed as undisputed master of our little cottage home.

A week later they were married; and directly the solemn ceremony was over they set out for London, Mr. Green having obtained a fortnight's holiday for the purpose; and as he happened to have some private affairs of his own which required his presence in the metropolis, he thought it would be a good opportunity to make the same journey serve the double purpose of a bridal and business trip.

During their absence I was left in charge of the house at Saltsea, and, had it not been for my books and the long country walks in which I still delighted (notwithstanding the melancholy fact of my having lost the dear friend and companion who had been wont in

the old days to share them with me), I should have been lonely indeed.

As it was, I often felt melancholy and depressed in spirit, as I held strange communings with myself; now recalling with an almost painfully vivid intensity the brightness and beauty of the past; now overwhelmed with gloomy thick-coming fears with regard to the future; now trying to comfort myself into the belief that my vague forebodings as to Mr. Green's tyrannical propensities would turn out to be merely the fanciful wanderings of my own distorted imagination; and then again relapsing into a state of intolerable restlessness and suspense, which seemed rather to increase than diminish as the time approached for the newly married pair to return.

I did not receive one single line from Mrs. Green during their fortnight's absence, but the day before that fixed for their home-coming a post-card reached me in her husband's handwriting, merely mentioning the train by which they expected to arrive, and curtly requesting me to meet them at the Saltsea station.

There was no message from his wife; no

word even of kindness on his own part; but then one does not expect as a rule to meet with anything in the shape of sentiment upon post-cards! I had therefore no reasonable grounds for finding fault, and took myself severely to task for the disappointment I nevertheless could not help feeling at the omission.

During the remainder of that day I could not settle to anything; and after my early tea I set out for a walk, carrying the obnoxious "card" in my pocket.

Instinctively I directed my steps to the churchyard, intending to descend to the seashore, according to my usual custom, by means of the cliff, which, as I have already explained, led directly down upon it.

Midway down the dusky avenue, however, I paused, as I had done a hundred times before, for the purpose of paying a passing visit to my mother's grave, which had now a double attraction for me, inasmuch as the spot selected for Mr. Joyce's final resting-place was close beside her own, having been long ago marked out by himself as the place of all others which he should wish to occupy when he too should be called upon to lay

down his life's burden and exchange the storm-laden atmosphere of earth for that "far serener clime" of which he used to think and speak so lovingly, and for which he was, I doubted not, most thoroughly prepared.

I was thinking of all this as I stood still, gazing upon the modest little tombstone erected to my ill-starred mother's memory, and recalling as in a dream the various occasions on which I had visited that very spot in company with the never-to-be-forgotten friend who now lay side by side with herself.

Each word as it had fallen from his lips seemed now to return to me with fresh force and distinctness; and as my eyes rested once more upon the familiar and significantly expressive sentence, which he had himself caused to be inscribed below those two mysterious initial letters, which, so far as I was personally concerned, meant so little, I felt a sort of strange calm descending upon my hitherto restless and perturbed spirit, making me recognise more vividly than I had ever before done the littleness of time and the vastness of eternity.

I was so absorbed in my own reflections

that I quite started when I presently heard a well-known voice asking rather aggrievedly:

"Well, boy; are you not going to speak to us?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I answered, starting slightly, and turning apologetically round on recognising Miss Vaughan and her governess; "I had no idea you were here. It is a long time since I have seen you," I added, after we had shaken hands.

"Yes, you were ill, you know," explained the young lady, regarding me with an air of condescending interest, "and Miss Belmont would not let me call and see you, though I wanted her to, several times."

"No, of course not," I answered. "It would not have been safe."

"You are quite strong again now, I hope?" kindly observed the governess.

"Yes, thank you," was my grateful reply.

"How tall you are," exclaimed her young companion, regarding me with a curiously investigating glance.

"Yes, they tell me that I have grown very much lately," I answered, consciously colouring under her scrutiny.

"How old are you?" inquired Miss Belmont, with a pleasant smile.

"Not quite fifteen," I replied; "but I feel so much older."

"Yes, I dare say you do," she responded; "you have had a peculiar bringing up, you see; and under any circumstances I suspect your disposition would have developed much sooner than that of most boys of your age."

"I don't like it much," volunteered Miss Laura.

"What don't you like?" I asked in perplexity.

"Why, seeing you grow so big and tall," she candidly explained.

"There is no harm in that," I quickly retorted; "a man *ought* to be big, I think."

"But you are not a man," she promptly amended; "you are only a boy."

"I suppose if I live I shall be a man before long," I replied, feeling at that moment as if my boyhood had long ago disappeared.

"Yes, I suppose so," she dubiously assented; "but I like boys best."

"Do you?" I asked, rather absently.

"Poor Mr. Joyce is dead," she continued, with one of those swift changes of subject

which invariably characterised her; "I am so sorry," and the lovely violet orbs grew tender and sympathetic.

"Yes," I answered, almost without knowing what I said; "and his widow has married again."

It is just possible that Miss Belmont may have detected a ring of bitterness in my tone, for she turned her spectacled eyes upon me with an expression of suddenly awakened interest, and asked kindly:

"Do you not like this Mr. Green?"

"Like him?" I repeated hastily, and with a half sob; "no; I don't care for him at all."

"My poor boy! that *is* a trial;" and she laid her hand kindly upon my arm.

"Isn't he nice?" demanded the younger lady, coming close up to me, and gazing wistfully into my face.

"Well, if he is only kind to her, I don't care," I answered, manfully trying to shake off my emotion and speak hopefully; "you see," I added, half apologetically, and I once more turned towards Miss Belmont, "*he*"—pointing significantly to Mr. Joyce's grave—"was *everything* to me; and it is not easy to forget."

"No, of course not," she answered kindly. "Still, you must not dwell too exclusively on your own loss; it will only make you miserable, and can do no possible good to anyone else."

I bowed my head assentingly, but could not trust myself to speak just then, and she went on, in gentle, reassuring tones:

"You will meet him again some day, you know, and in the meantime you must be patient."

I tried to smile, but failed miserably in the attempt; seeing which, Miss Belmont continued softly:

"Mr. and Mrs. Green are away just now, are they not?"

"Yes; but they return to-morrow," I replied, in a low, constrained voice.

"And you can't bear the idea of meeting them under such changed circumstances?" she quickly exclaimed.

"Yes, that's just it," I frankly confessed; "I'm so much afraid of saying or doing something wrong, and hurting her feelings."

"Oh, there's no fear of your doing that, I should think," was the encouraging response;

"you are too much attached to her to run the risk of vexing her."

"Well, I hope so," I hesitated; "but I can't help hating the man who has made her so soon forget her first husband."

"But, my dear boy, you must do your very best to banish the remembrance of all this from your memory."

"I am trying as hard as ever I can," I moodily assured her; "but you don't know how difficult it is."

"I am sure it is — most difficult," she hastened to admit; "still, it is not impossible, you know."

I looked at her rather incredulously, but said nothing; and she went on, after a moment's pause: "You remember what the Apostle Paul said: 'I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me.'"

"Yes," I replied, not half comprehending her meaning.

"Of ourselves we are quite unable to do *anything* that is good; but with His assistance there is nothing too hard for us. If you ask Him, therefore, He will help you to bear this trial, and perhaps it may eventually turn out even for your good."

Privately I was not very hopeful of any such desirable consummation being reached, but I looked upon her with too much respect to venture to dispute her opinion, and after a little more conversation on the same subject, and a condescending intimation from Miss Laura that she intended paying Mrs. Green and myself a visit before long, we separated, Miss Belmont and her charge proceeding in one direction, while I hastened off in the other.

CHAPTER VII.

PERSECUTION.

"Hatred is a slow continuing crime, a fire in the bad man's breast;
A dull and hungry flame, for ever craving, insatiate.
Hatred would harm another."

"Shall I lay perjury upon my soul?"

"Never do anything concerning the rectitude of which you have a doubt."

I DID not, after all, go to the station to meet Mr. and Mrs. Green, as in consequence of their having made some change in their arrangements they happened to arrive by an earlier train to that which they had intended, and came suddenly in upon me, therefore, nearly two hours before I was expecting them.

On first getting sight of them I forgot every other feeling in the pleasure I naturally experienced in once more welcoming the friend who had for so many years acted the part of a kind and indulgent mother towards me, and I sprang forward to meet her with an exclamation of irrepressible delight.

Just for the space of half a minute her arms were thrown lovingly around me, and her lips pressed affectionately upon my cheek.

Then she released me with rather an abrupt movement, and glanced nervously towards her husband, as if not quite sure whether he would altogether approve of so demonstrative a greeting.

He said nothing, however; only shook hands with me, with a lofty condescending air, and having performed this brief ceremony, he proceeded to make himself at home.

As the evening advanced, I could not help furtively regarding the recently married pair, and the more I looked the more strongly was it impressed upon my mind that poor Mrs. Green was already beginning to be somewhat afraid of her new husband.

There was a timid, irresolute expression

upon her face, which it had never previously worn, and she seemed particularly anxious to avoid saying or doing anything which could possibly have the effect of giving him offence.

This discovery did not, as may be imagined, tend to add to my own happiness; but I was wise enough to understand that if I wished to be of any practical help or comfort to her, I must put a strong curb upon myself, and not allow Mr. Green to notice that I had observed any peculiarity in her manner or appearance, much less that I suspected him of not being kind to her.

Accordingly, I did my very utmost to keep my own feelings under control, and look and speak just as if everything was going on in the most satisfactory manner, and it was very fortunate for me that I was thus able to preserve my equanimity and prevent my new master (for as such I instinctively recognised him) from obtaining an insight into my real sentiments, as I plainly perceived that he was quite prepared to act an aggressive part towards me, if he could only find the shadow of excuse for so doing.

Every now and then I caught his eyes fixed upon me with a shrewd and penetrating

expression, as if he wanted to discover just what I was thinking about; and whenever he addressed me it was in a sharp incisive tone very different to the bland and insinuating language he had been accustomed to make use of before his marriage.

He seemed particularly anxious to prevent Mrs. Green from holding any private communication with me, and never once left us together, even for a moment, until it was time for us to separate for the night.

The next morning he rose from his seat as soon as he had swallowed his breakfast, and said, addressing me with a half-sneer:

"Now, Charlie, get your hat and come with me; it is high time that you should see something of the world."

"What do you mean?" I asked; a sudden unpleasant sensation stealing over me.

"I mean, of course, to take you with me to the school," he answered sharply; "what else? You surely don't suppose that you are *always* going to lead the life of a fine gentleman, with a private tutor of your own to help you with your education?"

As he said this our eyes met, and like a revelation it appeared to me what he really

wanted. He knew perfectly well that the village school was no fit place for me; that I had already gone far beyond himself on many of the subjects in which he professed to be proficient; his sole object, therefore, was to annoy and humiliate me, and goad me into saying or doing something which would justify him in treating me with any amount of severity.

Never in all my life was I so sorely tempted as at that moment! Never before did I find it so difficult to keep back my rising temper, and maintain that "golden" silence which was, I knew, my only safeguard, if I wanted to avoid an open quarrel with the man who, having obtained all he wanted, had now no further object in acting towards me with even the semblance of courtesy.

Under other circumstances I do not think I could possibly have restrained myself from making *some* reply to the mortifying announcement he had so suddenly made; but one glance at Mrs. Green's pale, half-scared face made me set my lips firmly together, and inwardly resolve that, whatever my own personal feelings might be, she, at any rate, should be spared from all unnecessary anxiety on my account,

as she would, I strongly suspected, have quite enough to put up with in other ways.

While I was thus battling with my own emotion, and trying hard to appear calm and unmoved in look and manner, I was uncomfortably conscious that the schoolmaster's greenish-blue eyes were fixed with a sort of triumphant satisfaction upon my face, as if he could read just what was passing within me, and was only too glad to think he possessed the means of inflicting this mental torture by way, I suppose, of paying me out for having in the first instance tried to dissuade poor infatuated Mrs. Joyce from becoming his wife.

"Now, are you ready?" he presently observed, in a voice which warned me that he was not to be trifled with; "because there is no time to be lost;" and he glanced impatiently at the clock.

"Yes, I won't keep you a moment," I answered as composedly as I could speak; and I went into the narrow passage, and took down my cap from the peg which it usually occupied.

I was just setting off with him, when some curious impulse made me look back before

closing the door, and as I did so I caught poor Mrs. Green's eyes fixed upon me with such a sad deprecating expression that I was constrained to call out, in a voice of forced cheerfulness :

"Good-bye, mother ; I hope you won't be dull."

"Good-bye," she faintly responded, but low though the tones were, I fancied she was pleased at my being thus able to accept my new position with at least an outward show of contentment.

"I'll tell you what it is," snarled my companion, as soon as we had reached the little garden ; "you may just as well give up calling her mother."

"Very well," I acquiesced, still determined, if I could, to keep my temper.

"You see, she's no relation at all to you," he proceeded, with a spiteful sort of a sneer ; "there's no use, therefore, in going on if she was."

"I'll call her Mrs. Green for the future," I quietly responded ; and then I waited patiently to hear what would come next.

"Such perfect nonsense as it was, saddling themselves with the child of no-one-knows

who," he muttered, more for his own benefit apparently than mine. "I cannot think what possessed them to do it."

To this ungracious sentiment I ventured no rejoinder, although I felt strongly tempted to remind him that whatever reference the present and the future might personally bear to himself, he had at any rate no right to interfere with regard to the arrangements of the past.

"As you *are* here, however," he continued, after a short pause, "I suppose we must just put up with it as best we can; but I shall certainly expect you to make yourself useful." And having thus expressed his own ideas on the subject, he relapsed into silence, and did not again open his lips until we reached the village school-house.

Many were the sharp inquisitive glances which were directed towards me as I entered it in his company, and I could hear more than one half-whispered comment on my unexpected appearance; but I sat quietly down in the spot which my companion indicated, and without taking any apparent notice of the manifest surprise of the rough fisher lads, who already more than half-filled the unpre-

tending-looking building waited, with as much calmness and patience as I could muster to discover what was further expected of me.

Tongue could not express what I suffered during the next few days. At every turn I was made the victim of Mr. Green's tyrannical exactions and bitter, insulting invectives.

Before the whole school I was held up to ridicule, sometimes openly, sometimes covertly. I was given tasks to do which the most ignorant could easily have got through, and then, when I forced myself to lay my pride aside and recommence these rudimentary studies, which, under the circumstances of the case, were nothing more or less than a farce and mockery, Mr. Green would continually point out various purely imaginary mistakes, and insist on maintaining that all my previous education had been entirely thrown away, and that, in point of fact, I knew literally nothing.

His object evidently was to make me openly rebel against his cruel and unfair treatment of me; and often and often I fancied I must break through those strictly pacific rules which I had hitherto followed with regard

to him, and rid him altogether of my presence.

It was the thought of his poor wife which restrained me, as I could not help feeling that I was a sort of comfort to her. Not that she ever took me into her confidence, or told me in so many words that her second marriage had proved a mistake; but I could plainly see by her whole manner that she was thoroughly afraid of the man who had so artfully contrived to insinuate himself into her good graces, and made her look upon him not as he actually was, but as he pretended to be, so long as it suited his purpose to cajole and deceive her.

Now he had thrown off the mask, and shown himself in his true colours—spiteful, tyrannical, and intensely jealous and suspicious, without a single redeeming point in his character to make him appear in anything but an unamiable light, or encourage us to hope that there was a chance of his improving as time passed on, or becoming even a trifle less arbitrary and exacting.

So far as I was personally concerned, there was no disguising the fact, that for some reason or other he had conceived the most

violent aversion to me, and was always on the look-out to detect some real or fictitious ground of complaint against me.

If he had been content to persecute me during school hours, I could have borne it better, although even that was sufficiently unendurable; but what distressed me more than anything else was the pertinacious way in which he persisted in quarrelling with me before his wife, pouring into her unwilling ear a never-ending account of my numerous delinquencies, and almost forcing her, as it were, either to side with him against me, or else bring down upon herself the vials of her husband's displeasure; thus rendering her position a more painful and uncomfortable one than ever, and making her realise, with mortifying significance, how completely she was in his power, and how little idea he had of studying her feelings or being guided in any way by her opinions.

I will not attempt to describe the many painful scenes which I was called upon to go through during the next few months. Even yet I shudder at the all-too-vivid recollection of the systematic course of despotic treatment to which I was subjected; and it would

be neither pleasant nor profitable for my readers to have their attention too closely directed to this particular part of my history.

I will draw a curtain over it, therefore, merely observing that it was for Mrs. Green's sake rather than my own that I put up with it as long as I did; as, in spite of the serious drawbacks which I have mentioned, I still fancied that she derived a certain amount of comfort and satisfaction in having me with her, although, as time passed on, her terror of her husband increased to that degree that she was afraid to address a word to me in his presence, afraid even to look at me, lest she should thereby incur his displeasure.

Whenever we happened, however, by some happy chance, to find ourselves alone together, she more than made up to me for the enforced constraint of her usual manner, and showed me plainly enough, by the warmth and tenderness which invariably characterised her on these rare occasions, that in spite of the pressure which her husband had brought to bear upon her, in spite of the constant abuse which he heaped upon my unoffending head, and the shameful way in which he misrepresented my motives, and tried to

make her regard me in the same distorted light as he did himself, her affection for me had undergone no shadow of change, but that she felt towards me just as she had always done, and only regretted being compelled through the force of circumstances to keep back all outward demonstration of her sentiments when in the tyrant's much-dreaded presence.

I still continued to accompany him every day to the school, but he very soon ceased to go through the farce of pretending even to interest himself in my education, preferring rather to make use of me in a hundred different ways, converting me, in short, into a kind of scholastic drudge; forcing me to perform the most humiliating offices, and never by word or look vouchsafing to treat me with anything save that of absolute scorn and brutality.

He never neglected an opportunity of insulting me before the other boys, and scarcely a day passed that I did not suffer in consequence.

Still, he had not resorted as yet to actual *blows*, being deterred, perhaps, by the consciousness that if he once adopted *that* course

it might, on the whole, react unfavourably upon his own prospects, as it would enable me, if I felt so disposed, to complain of him to Mr. Vaughan, whose influence in the parish was quite sufficient to get him turned out of the post he occupied, and who, being, moreover, unmistakably interested in myself (on account, I suppose, of the fortunate chance which had led to my rescuing his idolised daughter from a watery grave), as evidenced by his periodical visits, and the minute inquiries he from time to time instituted regarding me, would be sure to resent the slightest approach to anything like actual violence, and probably adopt measures for having him ignominiously ejected from his present situation.

One morning, however, it so happened that I had unintentionally caused him the direst and most unmitigated offence, by pronouncing a certain exercise (which he had already, without my knowledge, examined and professed himself quite satisfied with) full of the grossest mistakes.

Having corrected it, I handed it to the boy who had written it, and was about to proceed in like manner with the rest of the

pile, which had been, as I supposed, placed ready as usual for my inspection, when Mr. Green came furiously up to me, and demanded what I was doing.

"Correcting these," I mildly explained, while I pointed to the ill-written scrawls which lay on the table before me. "You told me yesterday——"

"I don't care a straw what I told you yesterday," was the exasperated interruption; "you must have known perfectly well that I have myself already looked over them."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I answered, in surprise; "I understood you to say——"

"It does not signify in the very least *what* you may have understood," he retorted, without allowing me to finish my sentence; and he put out his hand with an imperative gesture, and seized the paper which I had so lately revised out of its owner's hand, greatly to the poor boy's trepidation, as he seemed by his looks to be in terror lest he also should come in for a share of the irate schoolmaster's displeasure.

"How dare you have the presumption to set up your opinion in opposition to mine?" proceeded Mr. Green, in a voice of concen-

trated passion, after he had cursorily examined the freshly corrected exercise.

"I had no idea you had even seen it," I replied, speaking as quietly as I could.

"I don't believe a word of it," he sneered; and there was a dangerous look in his eyes which showed him to be in a worse mood than usual. "Now," he added presently, in a bitter, sarcastic voice, "you will kindly sit down and write out this exercise yourself just as you found it, without any of your own stupid corrections."

"Very well," I responded, taking up a pen and preparing to obey his behest.

"And you will just add a note at the bottom of the page," he went on slowly and significantly, "to the effect that you have made a great mistake in meddling with it at all, and that it was quite right as it at first stood."

"I cannot do that," I observed, in a perfectly respectful though firm voice, "as it would not be the truth."

Again that dangerous glitter in his eyes warned me that he was in one of his most implacable humours; but careful though I always was to give him no unnecessary

ground of offence, I felt that I could not possibly reconcile it to my own conscience were I to follow his present suggestion, and utter what I knew to be a deliberate falsehood.

"You *will not*, I suppose you mean?" he hissed between his closed teeth; "but I shall teach you a lesson which may do you good, and make you beware how you attempt to defy me for the future."

Here, forgetting all his previous caution, he sprang upon me with a sudden movement, for which I was totally unprepared, and with one stunning blow felled me to the ground, and before I had sufficiently recovered my consciousness to realise what had occurred, he had seized a heavy riding-whip, which happened to stand conveniently near him, and began to belabour me so unmercifully that I must have fainted with the pain, for I remembered nothing more until, about half an hour later, I opened my eyes and found myself lying upon a sofa in a strange room, with Mr. Maxwell bending over me, apparently engaged in bandaging an ugly wound which had been inflicted on my head; while a quaintly-dressed, kindly-featured,

elderly female hovered about in the background, evidently ready to volunteer her services if needed, and yet not wishing to make a fuss by manifesting too much anxiety on the occasion.

"Lie still, there's a good lad," soothingly exclaimed the doctor, as I made a movement as if to struggle to a sitting posture.

"Where am I?" I inquired, in accents of bewilderment, not being as yet able to recall to mind what had occurred.

"Well, at the present moment you are monopolising my dining-room sofa," was the good-humoured reply; "but you won't require the loan of that long, I can tell you," and having given me this cheering assurance, he once more proceeded with deft fingers to arrange the bandage.

"What is the matter with me?" I demanded; and then it all came suddenly back upon me, and I added hastily: "Oh, I remember now."

"I would not bother myself about it, if I were you," kindly returned Mr. Maxwell; "just shut your eyes again and try to forget."

"How did I happen to come into your

hands?" I inquired, quite ignoring this sage advice. "I should scarcely have thought Mr. Green would have sent for you."

"Well, it is just possible that he did not send for me," explained the gentleman, with a grim smile. "The fact is," he continued seriously, as he gazed speculatively in my face, "one of the younger boys was so frightened at what was going on that he watched his opportunity, and the very moment he could do so without being detected, he made his escape, and as good luck would have it, he met me in the village street, and confided to me the startling intelligence that Mr. Green was murdering you. I lost no time, therefore, in making my own unexpected and most unwelcome appearance upon the scene; and finding that you were decidedly in want of my professional services, I insisted on carrying you off with me. So now you have the whole story, and I hope you will show your gratitude for my timely assistance by getting well as soon as possible."

"There's nothing wrong with me, I think," I answered, essaying to smile, "only my head feels dizzy when I try to move it, and my back is smarting terribly."

"Of course it is, my poor boy," was the sympathetic rejoinder, and Mr. Maxwell exchanged a rapid glance with the elderly female, who shook her head, and pressed her lips severely together, as if in righteous indignation.

"It is the first time he ever did that," I muttered, a tide of passionate emotion coming over me, "and it shall be the last. I will never go back to him again—*never!*"

"There is no reason why you should," encouragingly answered Mr Maxwell; "you are quite old enough to do something for yourself now, and he has of course no possible claim upon you."

Then, seeing, I suppose, that I was inclined to become excited, he made some excuse for leaving me to myself, and did not again return to me for a considerable time.

CHAPTER VIII.

PERPLEXITY.

"How poor are they that have not patience!
What wound did ever heal but by degrees?"

"I have some wounds upon me, and they smart
To hear themselves remembered."

During Mr. Maxwell's absence my thoughts were of a very mingled nature.

Anger, fierce and ungovernable, took possession of me from time to time, making me look upon the man who had thus insulted and humiliated me with something which was very nearly akin to hatred. A thirst for revenge, too, came welling up in my heart, and I fancied I could bear my present burden better if I was only assured that he would suffer in some way or other from his

late cowardly attack upon me. Then again the remembrance of poor Mrs. Green rose between us, making me accuse myself of unkindness and ingratitude towards her; for how could I separate the one from the other? It was quite an impossibility; for, whatever punishment might be inflicted upon him, she would be sure to be called upon indirectly to bear the heaviest share of it, and perhaps even his ill-treatment of herself might assume a more aggressive form if he discovered that I had been the means of bringing him into trouble.

"It's not the pain I care about," I observed to Mr. Maxwell, when he at length returned to me again, and began to condole with me upon my battered condition; "it's the shame and disgrace."

"So far as you are concerned there's no shame and disgrace about it," quickly replied the doctor; "everyone who hears what has taken place will be sure to sympathise with you, and unless I am greatly mistaken," he added significantly, "that bullying schoolmaster will lose his post as soon as the vicar discovers what sort of a man he really is."

"Will you do me a favour, Mr. Maxwell?"

I asked, eyeing him with undisguised anxiety, as I suddenly pictured to myself poor Mrs. Green turned out of her comfortable little home, and forced to leave a spot where she had spent so many happy years, and where she had always hoped and intended to end her days. For if Mr. Vaughan did in very deed take the matter up and oblige the schoolmaster to resign his post, it could not for a moment be supposed that the latter would consent to remain on in the neighbourhood of Saltsea, however anxious his wife might be to do so.

"A favour?" repeated the doctor, regarding me with a sharp glance. "You must tell me what it is first, as I'm not, as a rule, fond of making promises beforehand."

"I've been thinking the matter over," I explained, rather hesitatingly, "and I should be so much obliged to you if you would try to prevent Mr. Vaughan from knowing anything about it. He might be angry with Mr. Green, you see, and——"

"Of course he would," promptly acquiesced the doctor. "He sets his face like a flint against anything in the shape of corporal punishment, and in this case he would be

doubly indignant, as he takes a great interest in you, and has never forgotten your gallant conduct in rescuing his daughter from being drowned."

"Do you know whether he is yet back?" I inquired, in considerable anxiety.

He had been away for two or three weeks; but for anything I could tell to the contrary he might by this time have returned, and if so, he might possibly have been already informed of the little *contretemps* which had so lately occurred; and in this case, knowing his peremptory way of dealing with people, I could not be at all sure that the mischief I was so wishful to avoid had not actually been done.

To my relief, however, Mr. Maxwell answered presently:

"No; he's not expected home, I think, until next week."

"I'm glad of that," I replied, in all sincerity, "as there will be less chance of its getting to his ears."

"Why should you want to screen Mr. Green?" abruptly demanded the other, while he fixed his eyes rather disconcertingly upon my face.

"It's for the sake of his wife," I frankly explained. "I owe her more than I can ever repay; and I'm afraid if any unpleasant consequences were to spring from this affair he would revenge himself upon her."

"He cannot surely be such a brute as that!" remarked Mr. Maxwell, but in a tone which showed that he believed him to be quite capable of performing *any* atrocity.

"I believe he has got all her money into his own hands," I went on, feeling instinctively conscious that I could not have found a safer confidant, nor one who would be more likely to understand and sympathise with my motives in wishing to spare her pain.

"That's bad!" he responded, gravely shaking his head; "what poor infatuated creatures these women are, to be sure!" he added, with a half-pitying scorn—he was a confirmed bachelor, so may have been excused perhaps for speaking thus slightingly of the softer sex; "anyone with a grain of practical commonsense would have fathomed the man's reasons for wishing to marry her. I suppose *he* deluded her into the absurd belief that he cared for herself alone, and so she lost her head and gave up everything."

"She never guessed that he would turn out so differently to what she thought him," I half-apologetically reminded him.

"I dare say not," he contemptuously retorted, "but all the same she *ought* to have suspected; and then, instead of allowing herself to have been made a fool of, she might have been quite independent at this very minute, and been able eventually to provide for you in the way poor Mr. Joyce always wished and intended."

"I don't care about myself," I hastily assured him, "only I should like to keep her from being bullied, if I can."

"Very well, then," said Mr. Maxwell, after apparently cogitating the matter in his own mind for some minutes; "you just leave it to me, and I'll contrive to frighten him a bit without giving him an excuse for turning the table on other people;" and with a grim smile he moved away, and began to take a few thoughtful turns up and down the room.

Presently the elderly woman whom I had before seen came in and began to lay the cloth for dinner.

"How is he now, sir?" she asked, pointing kindly to my still recumbent figure.

"Oh, he's getting on first rate," was the cheerful answer, "only that awkward cut in the head makes it necessary that he should be kept as quiet as possible."

"You have been very kind to me, Mr. Maxwell," I said, beginning to feel decidedly nervous and uncomfortable at the thought of all the trouble I had given him, "but now I think I ought to go," and I made a frantic effort to get off the sofa.

"Foolish lad!" and a kind firm hand was laid upon my shoulder, and I was forced back upon the cushions; "do you want to faint again?"

"I don't like the idea of forcing myself upon you," I stammered out, rather incoherently.

"You did not force yourself upon me." laughed the doctor; "I brought you here *nolens volens.*"

"Yes, indeed; you were quite unconscious when the master came home with you," chimed in the woman, whom I afterwards discovered to be cook, housekeeper, and general supervisor of Mr. Maxwell's modest *ménage,* a boy in buttons being her sole assistant; "and a pretty fright you gave me,

I can assure you, as you looked far more dead than alive."

"You musn't frighten him, Rachel," smilingly remonstrated Mr. Maxwell, "or else he may fancy himself more seriously injured than he really is. Not that he is likely to do that, I think," he went on musingly; "he has got far too brave a spirit to allow himself to be easily dismayed, and he bears pain like a stoic."

I felt my face flush with pleasure at this spontaneous compliment from the lips of one who was generally considered to be more at home in administering blame than praise, and I glanced gratefully up at him as I murmured softly :

"I have not been much tried yet."

"Have you not? Well, for your age, I think you have had a very fair initiation," was the half-jocular reply ; "a badly broken arm, you know, is not a bad test to begin with ; and then, at the present moment," this was said more seriously, and accompanied by a look of great kindness, "unless I am very much out in my calculations, your head is aching frightfully, to say nothing of your other uncomfortable sensations."

"How clever you must be," I respectfully ventured to observe, "to find out all these kind of things without being told."

"Not at all," he disclaimed, in evident amusement; "I should be a disgrace to my profession if I did not understand a simple affair like this."

"Now, sir, your dinner is ready," was Mrs. Rachel's matter-of-fact observation; "and I hope," she added, *sotto voce*, "you may be allowed to take it in peace;" from which anxious remark I concluded that she was afraid lest some sudden summons from the outer world should come to interrupt him, before he had had time to do justice to her homely cookery.

"I wonder what our invalid would like?" soliloquised Mr. Maxwell, glancing speculatively around the table.

"Nothing, thank you," I hurriedly responded; "*indeed*, sir, I would much rather not," seeing him in the act of transferring something from one of the dishes to a plate which was evidently intended for my use; "I am not in the least hungry."

"Then in that case you must just eat to please me," he suggested, in a voice of quiet

authority. "I never allow my patients to starve;" and greatly to my own amazement, I found myself, a few minutes later, meekly submitting to his decision, and although every mouthful I took seemed to choke me, I yet contrived at last to finish the contents of my plate.

"Good boy!" was the doctor's approving remark, when I had finished; "I know it was an effort, but it will do you good. And now," he continued briskly, as he rose from his seat and rang the bell, "you shall not be bothered any more. I am going out myself presently to visit some people at a distance, and shall not be back until tea-time, so that when Rachel has cleared away the things you can lie quiet, and sleep, if you like, until my return."

"I wonder if Mrs. Green will be anxious about me?" I faltered, just as he was leaving the room.

"Don't trouble your head about that," he answered kindly; "I will call and let her know where you are."

"Will you really?" I exclaimed eagerly. "Oh, I am so much obliged to you."

"I shall be able to give her a hint, too, as

to what she had better say to her brute of a husband if he should begin to question her on the subject."

And having thus set my mind at rest on this important point, my kind host left me to my own devices.

Subsequently, he explained to me that he had found Mrs. Green in a terrible state of suspense, her husband not having condescended to enter into any of the particulars of the case, merely contenting himself with vaguely hinting at what had occurred so far as he was himself personally concerned, though he hesitated not to heap the most violent abuse upon my absent head, and made her shudder at the thought of what might happen to me if I should just then be brought into direct collision with him.

A few words from Mr. Maxwell served most completely to open her eyes to the true state of affairs, and she anxiously agreed to everything he said, and promised to be guided by him as to the course which it would be wisest, under the circumstances, to adopt with regard to my future prospects.

After what had occurred, it would be best for all parties, he said, that I should not

return to my old home; and she tearfully agreed that it might perhaps be unsafe for me to be again exposed to Mr. Green's brutality, as my spirit being once roused, and my natural pride up in arms at the recollection of the indignity I had suffered at his hands, I should probably find it utterly impossible to keep up the *rôle* I had hitherto followed, or treat him from henceforth with the slightest remaining vestige of respect.

My own feelings, meanwhile, were not to be envied. For some time after the doctor's departure I had taken his advice, and tried to obtain a little rest for my aching head; but by-and-by I grew restless and uneasy, the tide of thought became too strong for me, and I found the state of enforced inaction into which I had been so suddenly plunged most intolerable.

What to do I knew not—whither to turn for help; how to see my way out of the extraordinary position in which I was placed; where to go, even, on leaving Mr. Maxwell's house (for it was not of course to be expected that I should remain under his roof an instant longer than was absolutely necessary);

all these doubts and questions, mingled with gloomy forebodings as to the probable effect of our late fracas upon poor Mrs. Green's happiness, and melancholy retrospective glances as I sadly contrasted the present with the past, and longed with an intensity which was fraught with the most exquisite pain for a return of those "other days," the light of which had faded, alas, for ever.

Did Mr. Joyce see me, I wonder, as I struggled wearily through that long afternoon, thinking, thinking so often, so lovingly, and tenderly and regretfully of himself. I have sometimes fancied that it might have been so; fancied that he was not far off, although *I* could not discern him; fancied that he understood my difficulties better than I did myself, and in some mysterious way was permitted to minister to my peculiar wants, infuse a grain of comfort into my perturbed and care-weighted heart, and whisper silently, yet effectually, to my troubled and half-distracted imagination of peace which was yet to come, a time when earth's strife and warfare should have ended, and nothing remain but joy, unmingled and never-ceasing, a period of blessedness and pro-

sperity, beside which this world's fairest prospects and most substantial joys are but fleeting shadows, and dim and visionary phantoms.

He had talked to me so often and so earnestly of the littleness of time and the vastness of eternity; had tried so lovingly to impress upon my youthful mind the importance of not allowing one's self to be too strongly moved by any external circumstances; of looking upon life's trial with a calm and unperturbed spirit; bearing pain without flinching, and disappointment with equanimity; and although, at the time, his wise advice had often fallen upon unheeding and careless ears, I now found myself recalling his words with a kind of concentrated intensity which showed that they had not been altogether thrown away upon me, but might even yet, in time, lead to my ultimate good.

When Mr. Maxwell returned, he found me sitting up, looking, I have no doubt, very wild and ghastly, as the cut on my head had bled a good deal before he had succeeded in bandaging it to his satisfaction, and I was, as might have been expected, very much shaken, and by no means as strong as I would have wished him to suppose.

He eyed me critically as he entered, shook his head slightly when the survey was ended, but did not otherwise remark on my present condition.

He seemed, on the contrary, rather inclined to divert my thoughts from myself by repeating to me certain scraps of village news, such as might be expected to interest me; and not until the evening was far advanced—and he gathered perhaps from my anxious face and embarrassed manner that I was growing very uneasy at the prospect of spending the night I knew not where, hating the idea of ever again returning to Mr. Green, and yet vaguely wondering whether it might not, after all, be my duty to do so—did he revert to the subject of my own personal circumstances.

Then he said, cheerfully:

"I have seen Mrs. Green, Charlie, and she agrees with me that you had better stay where you are for the present; to-morrow she is coming to see you herself, and we can then consider what steps to take with regard to you."

"Shan't I be in your way?" I asked, somewhat timidly, feeling decidedly relieved, how-

ever, at having the matter thus arranged for me.

"In my way?" he repeated, with a little gesture of amusement; "of course not; I shall be very glad to have you."

"Thank you," I answered gratefully. "I won't disturb you more than I can help."

"I should not mind keeping you altogether, for the matter of that," he went on meditatively, "if I thought you would be content to settle down eventually as a village doctor; but——" here he looked rather searchingly into my face, "Mr. Joyce has spoilt you for that, I fancy, as he always talked as if nothing would satisfy him short of your going to college and distinguishing yourself in the literary world—was it not so?"

"Yes," I assented, a husky sensation coming into my throat as I suddenly remembered all his generous schemes for my benefit; "but I don't suppose I shall have a chance of learning anything more now."

"Well, we must wait and see what Mrs. Green says about it; and I think, also, Mr. Vaughan ought to be consulted on the subject, as I know Mr. Joyce took him into his full con-

fidence as to his own intentions regarding you. And in the meantime," this was added in an altogether different tone, "you must just forget all your troubles, and try to make yourself as comfortable as you can, until that nasty cut," pointing significantly to my bandaged forehead, "has healed up, and you are able to think over what has occurred, and take a calmer and more dispassionate view of the case than could just at present be expected from you."

The following morning Mrs. Green made her appearance.

She gave a little start on first getting sight of me, and I could see her lip quiver and her eyes fill with tears as she came silently up to me and kissed me over and over again, with tenfold more warmth and tenderness of manner than she was in the habit of manifesting towards me.

Then she sank down in a chair at my side, holding my hand tightly grasped in hers, and began to cry.

"Hush, mother!" I soothingly whispered, the old familiar name coming spontaneously to my lips; "you musn't vex yourself like this."

"My poor ill-used darling!" she gasped out as soon as she could recover herself somewhat; "to think that I should ever live to see you knocked about like this."

"It doesn't signify, mother," I hastened to assure her, in as cheerful a tone as I could assume; "I shall soon be all right again."

"It would have broken *his* heart," she moaned, "if he had ever thought that the boy he was so proud and fond of should be treated so shamefully! He made a perfect idol of you, and now——"

Here she paused and shook her head with an air of gloomy desperation, while the tears once more began to flow, and she clutched my hand convulsively, as if to show me that she at least was no party to her husband's cruelty.

Again I tried to comfort her; but it was no easy matter. For once in her life her placid, easy-going nature had been roused; her woman's heart rose up in horror at the thought of Mr. Green's brutality, and I plainly perceived, from the unusual excitement of her manner, that the dread with which she had for some time past regarded her tyrannical hus-

band had now given place to something very like loathing.

"I shall never forgive myself, Charlie," she said at length, in a self-accusing voice; "I have entirely ruined your prospects, and——"

"Now, don't talk like that," I interposed, speaking more cheerfully than I felt; "you have nothing to reproach yourself with, so far as I am concerned, as you have always acted most kindly towards me. If you had been my own mother you could not have done more for me."

"Ah, you little know what you are talking about, my dear," she groaned; "you little know the extent of my foolishness and infatuation! Why, at this very moment I have nothing in my own power, absolutely nothing. The very money which he—my poor dear first husband—had distinctly put aside for yourself is in Mr. Green's hands, and if I were to go down on my knees to him for it, he would not give up a penny of it."

Having expected nothing different, I was not quite so much appalled at this announcement as might under other circumstances have been the case, and I made another

strenuous effort to get her to view the matter in a less unfavourable light for herself. My efforts, however, in this direction, only met with partial success, as she continued most bitterly to bewail what she termed her own blindness and credulity in being made the dupe of a scheming, designing man, who probably cared not a straw for herself, but only for the worldly substance with which she had so unsuspectingly endowed him.

"The very first difference we had," she went on to explain, after I had in some slight degree succeeded in comforting her, "was while we were in London. I had all along taken it for granted that that money was at any rate safe; otherwise I should have used measures for securing it before my marriage. But when I ventured to oppose him, I found him so determined and—and cruel," here the colour sprang hotly into her pale cheeks, while her lips trembled visibly, "that it was worse than useless for me to attempt to stand out against his wishes."

"Of course it was," I gently assented, "dear mother! You could not help yourself;" and I stooped forward and kissed the poor flushed face, feeling at that moment

that I would give the world if I possessed it, could I only see her reinstated in her former free and unfettered life.

"I ought never to have married him," she went on, in a gloomy, self-reproachful voice; "you begged me not to do so, if you remember, and I have often wished that I had followed your advice, especially when I saw how unkindly he invariably treated you."

"We won't think of that now," I hastily interposed; "I dare say one day it will turn out all right. Dear father used to tell us that nothing comes by chance," I proceeded, as much for my own consolation as hers. I was about to say a few more words on the same subject, when an uneasy idea struck me, and I asked anxiously: "Won't Mr. Green be angry if he finds out that you have been to see me?"

"What does it signify if he is?" she responded, looking, however, rather frightened; "he cannot well make matters worse than they are at present."

"Oh yes, he might," I suggested; "if he thought you took my part, he would resent it dreadfully."

"He has no right to drive you away from

me like this !" she exclaimed. "He promised me faithfully, before I married him, that he would be a father to you, and——"

The rest of her sentence remained unfinished; for at that instant the door of the room where we were sitting was unceremoniously opened, and Mr. Maxwell appeared on the scene.

CHAPTER IX.

A GENEROUS OFFER MADE AND ACCEPTED.

"No backward path, ah, no returning!"

"Alas! our memories may retrace each circumstance of
time and place,
Season and scene come back again."

"I'm glad you have managed to pay the poor lad a visit," observed my kind-hearted host, as he came up to Mrs. Green and shook hands with her. "He was a trifle homesick last night, I think, so it will do him good to have a little chat with you."

"I shall never be able to thank you sufficiently for all your kindness," she answered, in a voice of much emotion.

"Oh, it's no question of kindness," he

smilingly responded, "but rather of expediency."

"I don't quite know what you mean by that," returned Mrs. Green, with a puzzled expression.

Mr. Maxwell shrugged his shoulders as he asked, with apparent irrelevance :

"Have you made up your mind as to the course which I yesterday recommended ?"

"Yes," she replied, in a stifled voice ; "I am quite sure that your plan is the best which could, under the circumstances, be adopted ; but I can't at the same time help feeling terribly distressed at the idea of losing him."

"No doubt," acquiesced the other; "but if it happens to be for his good you will, I am sure, submit to the separation."

"Well, I hope so ; but I shall be dreadfully dull without him," was the dejected answer.

"So far as you are personally concerned," continued Mr. Maxwell, "I should not be at all surprised if this unfortunate affair were to turn out an advantage rather than the reverse ; as your husband must naturally feel that he has gone too far, and will probably be

in a great fright, lest he should himself be called to account for it. He must know perfectly well what the consequences would be were we to bring the matter before the proper authorities."

"Yes, he seemed very uneasy all yesterday afternoon," admitted Mrs. Green, "and asked me several times whether any message had been received from you."

"I hope you told him what I said?"

"Indeed I did," she earnestly replied; "and he appeared for the moment really sorry—though whether that will last remains to be seen."

"Well, if you take my advice, you will go now," remarked Mr. Maxwell, after a moment's thought; "and unless you are absolutely driven to it, I would not let him know that you have been here."

"Very well," she meekly acquiesced, as she rose from her seat and prepared to take leave of me; adding, the next moment, "May I come and see him again?"

"Oh, certainly, you will be most welcome," the doctor hastened to assure her.

"Then, good-bye, Charlie, my dear!" she exclaimed, rather more cheerfully than she

had hitherto spoken. "I shall hope to have a glimpse of you to-morrow."

And after a few more words of affectionate meaning we parted.

When the morrow came, however, no Mrs. Green made her appearance; but towards the evening I received a hurriedly written letter from her, explaining that she had been unavoidably prevented from keeping her appointment, but that she hoped I would not think it unkind of her, as it was a great disappointment to herself, and nothing but sheer necessity would have kept her away from me. From which I gathered that Mr. Green had suspected her intention, and resolutely set himself to work to frustrate it, and prevent her from seeing more of me than he could possibly help.

"By a fortunate chance," so ran the postscript of Mrs. Green's letter, "I am able to send you the exact sum of money which was found in your poor mother's purse after her death; and I also enclose her diamond ring, and if I can by any possibility manage it, I will contrive to hand over a small sum every quarter for you through our kind friend Mr. Maxwell; so that you may not be entirely

thrown upon the liberality of others for that assistance which you ought, properly speaking, to receive from myself."

A few tenderly affectionate words followed, and then she subscribed herself:

"Your ever loving and sincerely attached mother,

"MARY GREEN."

A thrill of mingled pleasure and sadness ran through my frame as I read and re-read her kind and touching words, and I handled the sparkling gem, which had been taken from the unresisting fingers of my ill-starred parent, with a solemn, awe-stricken feeling, mentally resolving that no future pecuniary difficulties should ever tempt me to part with so valuable a relic.

I was earnestly regarding it, and speculating, as I had done a thousand times before, as to my own possible identity, when Mr. Maxwell disturbed my meditations by saying, in his short, abrupt way:

"I have just seen Mr. Vaughan, Charlie."

"Have you?" I asked, coming out of my reverie with a little start.

"Yes; he returned home last night, it

seems, and having already heard a whisper of the schoolmaster's goings on, he came to question me on the subject."

"I *hope* you did not say anything against him," I asked, rather uneasily.

"Well, I could not of course deny that there was some truth in the story, but remembering your anxiety about Mrs. Green, I tried to make light of the matter, merely mentioning in general terms that since her second marriage your life had not been a happy one, and that it seemed, therefore, desirable to make some other arrangements with regard to your future residence. He quite agreed with me in thinking that it might be better for you to take a fresh start, and he proposes that you should go at once to Middlebury and attend the college there. He can easily get you in on very favourable terms, as he is one of the governors or patrons, it seems, and has the power of nominating anyone he likes."

"But the expense!" I gasped out, fairly electrified at finding my way thus suddenly mapped out for me.

"Mr. Vaughan agrees to defray all expenses for the next three or four years. At

the end of that time he says you will be sure to get a scholarship, and perhaps other things besides, which will enable you to go to Oxford if you wish, or Mr. Vaughan's influence could procure you a good appointment elsewhere."

"It is very kind and generous of him," I hesitated, "but I think I would rather try to do something for myself at once; I do not like the idea of throwing myself upon other people."

"Well, I don't like you the less for wishing to be independent," observed the doctor, "but in this case the circumstances are certainly peculiar; Mr. Vaughan still considers himself under a very considerable weight of obligation to you for saving his daughter's life, and it would be a positive satisfaction to him, I believe, to be able to do something in a practical way for you. Then again, to take another view of the case," he went on, hastily interrupting me just as I was about to speak, "you have always the option of repaying him anything he may spend on your account."

"If I could only be sure of being able to do that," I demurred, "I should not mind it so much."

"What is to prevent your doing it?" demanded Mr. Maxwell; "you will be your own master after college hours, you know, and can act as private tutor to some of the stupid boys who need cramming."

"Yes, I might do that," I said, brightening up at the idea, "and there is this twenty pounds to begin with," handing him, as I spoke, the money which I had just received from Mrs. Green.

He smiled rather curiously as he thrust the notes back upon me again, saying carelessly:

"You must arrange all this with Mr. Vaughan when you see him. He wanted me to send you to the vicarage to-day, but I made some excuse, as I thought you would be the better of having a little longer rest first."

Mr. Vaughan was, however, about the last man in the world to be baulked of his purpose; and having once taken the matter into his own hands, he had no intention whatever of allowing the doctor, or anyone else, to regulate his movements.

Accordingly, greatly to my astonishment, and somewhat also to my annoyance, I found

myself suddenly confronted by him that very same afternoon.

I was sitting in Mr. Maxwell's dining-room, poring over a book which he had lent me before setting out to visit his patients, when I heard a sonorous voice pronounce my name.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I cried, rising hastily to my feet as I all at once recognised my visitor; "I did not know you were here."

"No; you were too much occupied with your book," was the good-natured reply, while the pompous-looking clergyman fixed his keen eyes upon me with so scrutinising an expression that I felt myself colouring up to the very roots of my hair.

"So you have been in the wars, I hear!"

This was his next sentence, uttered in a tone scarcely calculated to remove my embarrassment.

"You had better tell me all about it, I think," he continued, sitting deliberately down, with an air which seemed to imply any amount of power.

"There is very little to tell, sir," I an-

swered, making a prodigious effort to conceal my agitation.

"What is the meaning of that sticking-plaster?" commenced my interlocutor, pointing significantly to my head.

"It's only a slight cut," I replied indifferently.

"How did you get it?"

"I—I scarcely know," I stammered out, in such evident confusion that Mr. Vaughan probably gave me credit for telling an untruth, which was, in point of fact, not the case; for I had not the most remote recollection of the precise way in which I had met with that particular wound.

"You want to keep your own counsel, I see," drily remarked my visitor.

"Not exactly, sir," I respectfully made answer; "only the truth is, Mr. Green and I quarrelled; and it's not a pleasant thing to talk about."

"No; especially if you were the person most in fault," he responded, once more gazing at me with a shrewd, penetrating expression; "lads of your age are often headstrong and passionate."

"Yes, sir," I admitted, rather relieved

than otherwise to find that he seemed inclined to look upon me as the principal culprit.

"And I suppose you irritated Mr. Green by setting up your opinions in opposition to his own?" pursued the gentleman, in cool, incisive tones.

"Yes; that is just what I did," I truthfully acknowledged.

"And then his temper got the better of him, and he determined to make an example of you. Was that it?"

"Yes," I again confessed, this time in a very low, unsteady voice; for although I still wished to spare Mr. Green, for the sake of his much-enduring wife, I could not be expected to think of his brutal conduct towards myself with anything but bitterness and indignation.

"Well, what is done cannot be undone," oracularly proceeded Mr. Vaughan, after a long pause, during which he had once more been engaged in the diligent study of my countenance; "so there is no great use in sifting the matter further. We are all apt to forget ourselves at times, you know"—whether this remark was intended to apply

to myself or Mr. Green I could not tell—"and I think, on the whole, it may perhaps be an advantage to you to be thrown somewhat more upon your own resources than has hitherto been the case, as it will teach you self-reliance."

Then, with a swift change of voice and manner, he went on abruptly:

"Has Mr. Maxwell told you of my proposal?"

"Indeed he has, sir," I answered earnestly; "and I am greatly obliged to you for your kind and generous offer, only——"

"Only what?" he demanded rather sharply, as I paused in irresolution.

"I cannot explain it exactly," I replied rather doubtfully; "but it seems as if I ought to be content with the education I have already received, and try at once to get some kind of a situation——"

"Nonsense! you are far too young for that sort of thing," hastily interrupted Mr. Vaughan. "Besides, a lad with your abilities ought to have, at any rate, the chance of getting on in the world; and if you do as I suggest you will be as nearly as possible carrying out the wishes of Mr. Joyce, as he

fancied (and not altogether without reason, I should say) that you were of gentle birth, and it was the one desire of his heart to bring you up in strict accordance with that idea. He would never have given his consent, therefore, to your choosing anything but a respectable profession; and I am only helping you to follow the course which he would himself have recommended, had he been spared to finish the good work which he so kindly and generously undertook (in the face of many difficulties and discouragements) immediately after your poor mother's death."

I understood perfectly well what he meant by thus alluding to the difficulties of Mr. Joyce's position; as, although the latter had always made a point of speaking lightly, almost disparagingly, of himself and his own doings, he had not disguised from me the fact that Mr. Vaughan had from the very first strongly disapproved of his charging himself with the trouble and responsibility of bringing me up, and done his very utmost to shake his resolution, and induce him to consign me to the questionable guardianship of certain authorities connected with some par-

ticular charitable institution in which the vicar was himself interested, and which he especially recommended as being the place of all others most suitable for the reception of a nameless waif like myself, whose very parentage was unknown, and of whose antecedents no glimmer of information could be obtained, in spite of all the inquiries which were set on foot to clear up, if possible, the mystery, and ascertain with more certainty than vague surmise to what social status I belonged, and whether there was anyone among my as yet undiscovered kin who would be likely to come forward, acknowledge the relationship, and relieve my generous friend and protector from all future trouble and responsibility with regard to me.

Now that he—my kind, tender-hearted, and unselfish benefactor — was gone, Mr. Vaughan seemed quite ready to overlook the fact of his not having, during his lifetime, seen exactly eye to eye with himself on this as well as on a few other minor points; and whenever he made any allusion to him it was always in terms of the greatest respect.

"I shall leave you now to think over what I have said."

This was the clergyman's final summing up of the case, as he slowly rose from his seat about ten minutes later, and condescendingly put out his hand in token of leave-taking.

"To-morrow Mr. Maxwell has promised to bring you to the vicarage, so that you can then tell me how you like your new prospects, and we will arrange as to the date of your entering the Middlebury College, and the rest of the minutiæ connected with the whole affair."

Having thus lucidly told me what to expect, he hurried away, without giving me time to make any suitable response, and I was once more left alone to turn over the matter in my mind, and wonder whether I should be justified in availing myself of his generous offer.

Inclination said *yes!* but then, as Mr. Joyce had often reminded me, inclination and duty are not, as a rule, synonymous terms; but, on the contrary, the thing most necessary to be done is not unfrequently that against which our own personal feelings most consciously rebel; so that I could not be *quite* sure whether this intense love of study,

which had taken possession of me at so very early an age; that craving after a higher intellectual altitude than that which the generality of those with whom I chanced to come in contact seemed to occupy, might not, after all, be merely a morbid kind of self-indulgence, which ought to be checked instead of encouraged.

Still, there was no denying the fact that I was young—too young to be entrusted with any responsible kind of employment; so that if I did persist just then in declining the vicar's proffered aid, and trust to my own resources for a livelihood, I must perforce content myself with a very subordinate position to that which I might confidently expect, under other circumstances, to obtain.

Later on in the day I was induced to explain my various conflicting doubts and difficulties to Mr. Maxwell, who listened to all I had to say with the greatest patience and every appearance of interest, and gave me the benefit of his own advice—advice which I finally resolved on following, as he was, I knew, a man of shrewd practical common sense, and one, moreover, for whom Mr. Joyce had always entertained a feeling of

undoubted respect, and on whose judgment he would, I fancied, have wished me to rely.

Accordingly, when I found myself at the vicarage the following afternoon, and was kindly questioned by Mr. Vaughan as to whether I had made up my mind to put myself in his hands, and carry out the *rôle* which he had so hastily sketched out for me, I thankfully responded in the affirmative; whereat he expressed himself as being greatly pleased, and lost no time in communicating with the head master of the Middlebury College, and getting me enrolled as a pupil, and all the necessary preliminaries settled with a view to my recommencing my interrupted studies.

When everything was definitely arranged, he accompanied me himself to the quaint old cathedral town, in which I was for some time at least to reside, and having introduced me to the authorities, and taken measures for ascertaining that my education would be properly proceeded with, he bade me a kindly adieu, and went away, promising to come again before long, in order to see how I was getting on in my new sphere.

CHAPTER X.

GUIDE, PHILOSOPHER, AND FRIEND.

"In the very May-morn of his youth,
Ripe for exploits and mighty enterprises."

"In the lexicon of youth which fate reserves,
For a bright manhood, there is no such word
As—fail."

"Mix a short folly, that unbends the mind."

I NEED not enter into a lengthened description of the manner in which I spent the next four years.

My readers will readily believe me when I say that I worked hard—very hard! for not only did my own natural love of study urge me on, but also the wish to act in such a way as would the most effectually testify to the gratitude I really felt towards the kind friends who had come so generously

forward just when I stood in need of a helping hand, and smoothed my path for me, by putting me in the way of obtaining the thing of all others which I the most ardently desired—an opportunity of cultivating my talents, and devoting my whole time and attention to those intellectual pursuits in which my soul delighted.

When I first went to Middlebury, Mr. Vaughan had made arrangements for me to reside with one of the masters of the college —a Mr. Whitworth, who happened to be a personal acquaintance of his own, and was generally allowed to be a man of very considerable learning, and one, moreover, who might have asked almost any terms from the parents of those whom he received under his roof, so thoroughly was his worth appreciated.

This was an immense advantage to me, and gave me a certain standing at once alike with tutors and pupils; as it was a well-known fact, that Mr. Whitworth never charged himself with the supervision of any youth of whose ultimate educational success he was at all doubtful.

Knowing his exclusiveness, I was totally

amazed to find myself consigned to his guardianship, and I could not help expressing my surprise to Mr. Vaughan, when he proceeded to inform me of the plans he had entered into on my behalf.

He smiled complacently at my evident astonishment, and then condescendingly explained that it was partly out of respect for himself that Mr. Whitworth had consented to receive me ; partly because of the very decided interest he had felt in my early history, and last, but not least, continued the dignified clergyman, he was no doubt greatly influenced by the account he had heard of my studious habits, and the extraordinary proficiency I had already made under poor Mr. Joyce's tuition.

This version of the case, although satisfactory in a certain sense, did not, however, serve to clear up one particular point on which my own mind was just then strongly exercised—I refer to the question of expense !

Naturally I hated the idea of allowing Mr. Vaughan to pay more than was absolutely necessary on my behalf : naturally also, I gathered from the little I had seen

and heard on the subject, that Mr. Whitworth's charges were far higher than anything I had ever dreamt of incurring; and I could not help feeling anxious and uneasy at the thought of being burdened at the very outset of my career with so heavy a weight of monetary obligation, which I might hereafter find it not easy to repay.

I could scarcely express these doubts to Mr. Vaughan without appearing ungrateful, especially as he seemed himself inclined to look upon me in the light of a most highly-favoured and much-to-be-envied individual, for getting the chance even of making my *debût* under such propitious circumstances.

Ere long, however, a suspicion of the truth seemed to dawn across the vicar's mind, and he hastened to relieve me of my solicitude, by informing me, quite confidentially of course, that in consideration of my strange history, and out of regard for the late Mr. Joyce, whom he had long known and esteemed, Mr. Whitworth had spontaneously offered to receive me for less than half his usual terms, and had even promised to reduce them still further in the event of my being able and willing to undertake the charge of a

much younger pupil than myself, who had lately been consigned to his care, and would probably require a good deal of assistance in the preparation of his studies.

Under these exceptionally advantageous circumstances I had no excuse, therefore, for being anything but pleased and satisfied, and I inwardly resolved that no effort on my part should be wanting to show how thoroughly I appreciated the kindness which had been so liberally bestowed upon me, and how earnestly I longed for an opportunity of testifying that appreciation in a practical and decided manner.

For the first few weeks after my domestication under his roof, I was conscious at every turn of Mr. Whitworth's keen scrutiny. He said little; being as a rule very quiet and reticent in his manner; but whatever he did say was to the purpose, and showed that nothing that went on was hidden from him; every trait and idiosyncrasy of your character was known to him, and by some strange unerring instinct he was aware of the precise motive which actuated you in your most trifling actions, and whether he awarded blame or praise, it was always in

the right place, and neither more nor less than you deserved.

He was very slow in expressing an opinion as to any one's merits or demerits; and never appeared to come to a decision until he had carefully examined into the minutest particular, weighed the *pros.* and the *cons.* with the utmost nicety, and thoroughly settled it in his own mind as to whether the person in question was or was not worthy of his confidence and esteem; but when once he had succeeded in solving *this* knotty point, and arrived at a satisfactory conclusion on the matter, he never suffered the adverse criticisms of others to affect his own conduct, or swerved even a hair's breadth in his future kindness and friendly regard.

When I first took up my abode under his roof, his family consisted of himself, an elderly widowed sister of his own, and three well-advanced boarders, whose course of study, so far as the Middlebury College was concerned, was fast drawing to a close, in addition to the lad whom he had mentioned to Mr. Vaughan as being likely to require assistance in the preparation of his lessons.

To this boy—Harold Fortescue by name—I soon became sincerely attached. He possessed first-rate abilities, if he only chose to exercise them; and was one of the kindest, warmest-hearted, generous-handed fellows I ever met with; but he was sadly deficient in application; never gave himself more trouble than he could help, and hated beyond anything the idea of regular steady work.

By fits and starts he could be industrious enough; the great difficulty was to keep him up to the mark, and impress upon him the importance of perseverance if he ever wished to attain proficiency in his studies.

As a very young child he had been extremely delicate, and was allowed in consequence to have his own way in everything, and never forced to adopt a line of conduct which did not commend itself to his youthful inclination.

Now, however, matters were changed; his health had become completely established, and it was deemed advisable by his friends that his hitherto somewhat neglected education should be proceeded with, and the installation of a private tutor in his own

home having proved a failure, arrangements were made for him to attend the Middlebury College, under the immediate supervisal of Mr. Whitworth, who, being nearly related to the Fortescue family, and possessing also considerable influence over Harold himself, was looked upon as the fittest person to undertake the onerous charge of endeavouring to awaken his latent faculties, and induce him to make use of the talents with which he had been so liberally endowed.

Not until Mr. Whitworth had thoroughly examined into the extent of my mental and moral qualifications; critically regarded my general conduct, both in his own house, and at the college; and made himself perfectly conversant with every trait and peculiarity of my character, did he say one word to me of the project he had formed with regard to his young relative's education; and, feeling, as I could not help doing, that this reticence arose from the fact of his being still engaged in the mental process of determining whether I was worthy of his confidence—or at any rate competent to fulfil the duties of which Mr. Vaughan had spoken—delicacy of course forbade *my* alluding ever so remotely to the

subject, unless he first led the way to it.

One Saturday evening, however, after our late dinner was over, and my fellow-students and myself were busily occupied in putting away our books and papers for the week, I was suddenly summoned to an audience with the "Master," in his private study.

"Sit down, Charlie," he said, kindly, as I entered, and his serious dark eyes looked at me with a softer gleam than usual; "I want to talk to you."

Mechanically I subsided into the indicated seat, and waited respectfully to hear what would follow.

"I am always very slow in arriving at a decision where the interests of other people are at stake," he proceeded, after a moment's pause, "and although I heard an excellent report of you from Mr. Vaughan, and other quarters, I did not allow that fact to prevent me from exercising my own judgment in the matter, and finding out for myself whether your character and attainments were such as I could altogether approve of."

This preamble was not exactly calculated

to produce a self-satisfied or complacent impression upon my mind. Still I derived a certain amount of comfort from the reflection that whether my conduct had or had not come up to Mr. Whitworth's standard, I had at all events done my best; and had certainly not been guilty of any wilful dereliction of duty since becoming a member of his household. If, therefore, he had anything to complain of, it would not be intentioned misconduct on my part, and unwitting offences would I knew be leniently dealt with by so strictly just and upright a man as the one I had to deal with.

"Now, however, I have no hesitation in expressing my entire satisfaction with you," continued Mr. Whitworth, to my intense relief; "I have watched you narrowly, and the highest praise I can perhaps give you, is to say that you reflect credit upon Mr. Joyce's training; and must, I am sure, have been a pupil after his own heart."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" I eagerly exclaimed, tears springing to my eyes at this most welcome tribute of commendation, which, coming from his lips, meant more, far more than if it had been awarded me by anyone

else. "He took so much trouble with me," I went on rather stammeringly, by way of accounting for my sudden excited outburst, "that unless I had been very stupid, indeed, I *must* have contrived to make some kind of progress."

"It is quite easy to see you appreciated his efforts in that direction," was the gracious rejoinder, "but you are perfectly right not to take too much praise to yourself, as you could never have succeeded without his valuable assistance in getting so well placed as you have done in the College."

"No, indeed," I answered heartily; "I cannot be too thankful;" and then I stopped, and shook my head sadly, as the memory of the happy past came flashing back upon my recollection, mingled with the sad consciousness that he whom I had so loved and revered, was in very deed gone beyond the possibility of a recall; and that never again, so long as life lasted, should I look upon his earnest face, or listen to his gentle tones.

"Mr. Vaughan tells me that you are of an intensely proud and independent spirit," observed Mr. Whitworth, speaking again

after the lapse of a few seconds, "and that you would fain make your way in the world without receiving aid from anyone—is this the case?" and the keen dark eyes were bent questioningly upon my face.

"Well, sir," I frankly admitted, feeling myself colouring under his scrutiny, "if it could by any possibility be managed, I would far rather depend upon my own exertions than the kindness of my friends; I don't quite know whether this sort of feeling can be called pride."

"There's no harm in it at any rate," he returned, smiling a little; "in proof of which, I am going to put you in the way of making a fair start towards doing something for yourself."

"You are very kind," I murmured, scarcely knowing what else to say.

"There is just a chance, however, that it may not answer in the long run," he proceeded deliberately to explain, "but you can at all events try it; and if it should be too great a strain upon you, you will always have the option of being able to give it up."

"I am ready to do anything," I began

somewhat eagerly, when Mr. Whitworth checked me by interposing significantly :

"I know you are, so far as good intentions go ; but your strength may not always be commensurate with your wishes. However," he added more cheerfully, "I think, in the present case, you will probably find yourself equal to the undertaking ; and if so, I for one shall be very glad."

And he forthwith proceeded to explain to me at some length his views regarding his young relative.

It would be no light charge, he reminded me, as I should have to devote every moment of leisure time to my new duties, and often perhaps meet with difficulties and discouragements on account of Harold Fortescue's well-known carelessness and disinclination for self-exertion ; but if I *did* succeed, he went on to inform me, in getting him to acquit himself in a fairly creditable manner, the result, so far as I was personally concerned, would be, that my services in this respect would be considered a full equivalent for the advantages I gained by residing under his own roof.

This arrangement would of course relieve

Mr. Vaughan from any further expenses connected with my board, and be, in consequence, a very great and inexpressible satisfaction to my own mind—albeit I could not (inexperienced though I was in such matters), lose sight of the important fact that it would only be a one-sided bargain after all; my own share in the transaction being very insignificant when compared to that which Mr. Whitworth proposed doing.

When I ventured to give utterance to these very natural sentiments, however, the latter contrived in some way or other to silence me; I forget now what particular arguments he brought forward to satisfy my scruples, but, whatever they may have been, they proved at the time unanswerable, and I retired at length from the interview vaguely conscious of a strange new feeling stirring at my heart; a sort of tender reverential admiration and regard for the man who had acted thus kindly and generously towards a poor struggling candidate for independence, such as myself.

As soon as the compact we had entered into became known—that part of it, at least, which related to Harold Fortescue and

myself—I had to undergo a vast amount of "chaffing" from the other boarders, varied by an occasional solemn assurance on the part of first one and then another that they did not envy me my new position; that I should, in short, soon find myself occupying (instead of the sinecure which no doubt I fondly expected) a weighty and responsible post, the arduous duties and obligations of which would, they very much feared, turn me prematurely grey, change my naturally lively and facetious manner (this was a hit at my somewhat grave and reserved deportment) into a preternatural depression of spirits, and entirely metamorphose my whole being, making me, to all intents and purposes, an octogenarian before I had, properly speaking, fully arrived at man's estate.

As for Fortescue, he went into fits of irrepressible laughter at the idea of my having been selected to—what he called—act as guide, philosopher, and friend to himself. He could not, I think, have manifested more surprise and amusement if one of the street Arabs had been brought in to assist in the preparation of his lessons.

"Yes, I certainly *was* told that I should be provided, ere long, with a private tutor," he mirthfully acknowledged, when I essayed to remind him that he had all along been given to understand that such was Mr. Whitworth's intention with regard to him; "so far you are right; but it never once occurred to me that *you* were to be the Solomon employed to coach me up in my neglected duties; and really, Mr. Hale," here he surveyed me with an air of mock respect, "I feel that an apology is due to you for the free-and-easy way in which I have hitherto been accustomed to behave myself in your august presence. Had I only been aware of your identity, I should, I assure you, have comported myself differently. You look so young, you see," he went on, with well-simulated gravity, "that it never for one moment occurred to me that you were Methuselah in disguise;"—here a roar of laughter from the other students interrupted him—"but now that my eyes have been opened to the true state of the case, I can only throw myself upon your mercy, and beg most respectfully to assure you of my regret for my past familiarity"—"Well done,

Harold!" vociferated the older trio, who appeared most thoroughly to enjoy the little scene—"and to give you my solemn promise that for the future I will treat you with becoming reverence, and that deference which is undoubtedly due to your mature age and vast understanding."

Another outburst of laughter followed this witty summing-up of the case; and had I not previously known something of the light-hearted incorrigible youth, whose studies it was now my duty to direct, I should have felt decidedly nonplussed and discouraged at hearing myself thus held, as it were, up to ridicule, and my own fitness for my new office apparently called in question.

As it was, I felt for a few minutes rather puzzled how to act. Then I inquired gravely:

"Do you really think I am not properly qualified to act as your tutor, Harold?"

"*Qualified*, my dear fellow, of course you are!" promptly chimed in one of the others, putting on an expression of mock respect; "why, the profundity of your learning is at the present moment the topic *par excellence* which engrosses the whole Middlebury

population, from the most eminent of our Cathedral dignitaries to the meanest of our crossing sweepers; while as for your age, it is universally acknowledged that you came out of the ark with the Noah family. Of course, the trifling fact of your having a boyish face goes for nothing at all, as centuries ago you doubtless discovered the elixir of life, which, as we all know, when copiously quaffed, supplies one with perennial youth!"

"The ark, indeed!" laughingly exclaimed one of his companions; "nothing so common, Longley! He lived long before the deluge. I can tell you all about his pedigree, if you care to hear it. You all of you remember Cain?" looking around for approbation.

A chorus of voices answered in the affirmative, and he was going on in the same jocular strain when I interrupted him by saying quietly:

"You are welcome to laugh at *me* as much as ever you like, as I can quite understand that it does seem presumptuous of me to set up as a sort of teacher at my age; but would you mind choosing some other book

instead of the Bible?—it seems to me far too sacred to be treated with levity."

"All right," began the first speaker, with more good-nature than I had anticipated; and having said this, he stopped short in some confusion, and glanced in the direction of the door, where, greatly to our astonishment, we discovered Mr. Whitworth. He had evidently entered the room just in time to overhear my last sentence, for coming deliberately up to me, he put his hand kindly upon my shoulder, observing, in a grave earnest tone:

"You are quite right, Charlie—the Bible is the last book in the world to be treated with irreverence."

"It was not really meant for irreverence, sir," I explained, feeling somehow as if I had unwittingly got my companions into a scrape, and that it was, therefore, my bounden duty to get them out of it again as best I could. "I was only afraid that it might *lead* to it, if we were to continue the subject."

"Oh, if that is the case, I have no more to say," he answered, with a shade less gravity, "except that I am glad to find that

you see the impropriety, to use no stronger term, of jesting on serious subjects."

And having thus briefly given us the benefit of his opinion, he once more left us to our own devices.

"You are a brick!" energetically protested the eldest of the little group, turning condescendingly towards me as the door closed upon Mr. Whitworth; "some fellows of your age would have simpered and tried to look pious at the expense of the rest of us, instead of succeeding in allaying the governor's incipient suspicions, as you did."

"Yes, he's neither a sneak nor a coward!" seconded Mr. Longley, "and I, for one, will uphold his authority from this day forward," darting a mischievous glance at Harold Fortescue, "in spite of his youth."

"It's wonderfully easy for you to talk in that grandiloquent fashion," retorted the latter, in accents of pretended indignation; "*you* are not expected to put yourself, body and soul, into his paternal arms, and do just what he tells you from morning till night, and for aught I can tell, from night till morning again."

"Ah, there's the rub!" laughed the others;

"poor Fortescue! well you may shrink back appalled at the prospect."

"He talks of getting a scholarship for himself in precisely the same matter-of-fact terms as *I* speak about sitting down to dinner," continued my hopeful charge, making a gesture of comical dismay; "while as for exhibitions, and things of that kind, he seems to think he has nothing to do but simply put out his hand and graciously receive them. If, therefore, he holds these exalted ideas on his own account, there is no knowing what kind of views he may entertain with regard to my individual self. He *may* insist, perhaps, for anything I can tell to the contrary, on seeing me formally installed as Lord Chancellor, or some other equally dignified position before he has done with me."

"I'm afraid there's no chance of your ever climbing *quite* so high as the woolsack," I answered, with an amused smile; whereupon he veered suddenly round, and accused me of wishing to under-rate his abilities, by way of enhancing the value of my own; appealing to the rest of the little conclave, meanwhile, with such a ludicrously reproach-

ful air, that they could not help giving vent to another paroxysm of laughter, in which Harold himself presently joined as heartily and good-humouredly as either of the others.

CHAPTER XI.

MY SECOND VACATION.

"We are mainly what we make ourselves, what we suffer outer circumstances to shape us,
As yielding or resisting, and linked with right and wrong;
Duties omitted, duties done, combine to form our fates,
As faith and works may fashion them, or negligence and passion."

In spite of Horace Fortescue's pretended indignation at my being the person appointed to superintend his studies, he was never rude nor unreasonable with me; but having once become accustomed to the idea, and finding out, I suppose, that although I was not, so far as age went, entitled to receive any particular respect from him, I was at the same time perfectly competent to fulfil the

duties I had undertaken, and always ready to clear up any difficulties for him, and be as useful to him as I possibly could, he soon ceased to find fault with the arrangement, but became, on the contrary, as the weeks and months passed on, really fond of me; showing himself willing and even anxious to carry out any suggestion I might make with regard to the several branches of learning in which he was expected to take an interest, and making the most surprising progress in more than one department, greatly to Mr. Whitworth's satisfaction, and the intense delight of Harold's own father, who, although he had not the necessary firmness to exercise anything but the very mildest form of authority over him himself, was yet excessively anxious—almost morbidly so—that he should grow up a clever, if not really distinguished member of society.

I spent my first vacation in London, having accompanied Mr. Whitworth at his own special request, as he had engaged to take charge of Harold, in consequence of there being some kind of epidemic raging in the neighbourhood of the latter's own home, and wanted me to act as his companion, and

look after him when he was himself prevented from doing so, by way of keeping him out of mischief.

When the second college term had expired, however, and before I could do more than vaguely speculate as to my probable destination, I received a letter from Mr. Vaughan, kindly informing me that he should, for the future, expect me to spend my holidays with him.

He had already paid me several visits, and expressed himself highly gratified on hearing of the progress I was making, and the satisfactory result of the experiment which had been tried regarding Harold Fortescue.

He was evidently afraid at first that I should find this latter charge too much for me, in addition to my own studies, which certainly required a good deal of time and thought, as I was fully determined in my own mind, that, if there *was* anything in the way of honours to be gained at the Middlebury College, I would not be the last to put in my claim for at least some of them !

Mr. Maxwell, too, had been on more than one occasion to see me ; but up to the time of my going to spend this second vacation at

the vicarage, I had not had an opportunity of obtaining even a passing glance at poor Mrs. Green.

I wrote her one letter, which she never answered; but she sent me a message by the kind-hearted doctor, to the effect that her husband had strictly prohibited her from entering into a correspondence with me, and that she was too much afraid of him to run the risk of disobeying him.

I received a very cordial welcome from the vicar and his young daughter, who had grown—at least in my partial eyes—fairer and more fascinating than ever, though she teased me most unmercifully the whole time I remained at the vicarage; ordered me about in her childishly imperious fashion, and scarcely gave me a moment's peace.

As for studying with her in the house, it was simply an impossibility; for if I did by any happy chance find myself in possession of one of my favourite volumes, it was safe to be wrested out of my hands the very next time she came into the room, and thrown indignantly aside; while the laughing violet eyes would be turned reproachfully upon me, and the soft silvery tones begin to

take me to task for being dull and stupid and prosy; and somehow, the more she scolded and tyrannized over me, the more irresistible did I find her, and the better I liked her.

Miss Belmont had gone away for a few weeks' holiday, so that there was no one, as she gleefully informed me, to keep her in order, her aunt being far too placid and inert even to pretend to exercise a restraining influence over her, and Mason having long before this recognised the fact that "Miss Laura" had got beyond her; while as for the vicar, he simply idolised the wilful, capricious, restless, and impulsive, yet sweet-tempered girl, who took the most unwarrantable liberties even with his pompous and dignified self, and appeared to stand no more of awe of him than of the very swans she was in the daily habit of petting and feeding—greatly to Mr. Vaughan's dissatisfaction, as he could never forget how very nearly she had been drowned once before while engaged in that particular occupation.

It was on a Saturday evening that I arrived at Saltsea; and had I consulted my own inclination, I should have made an

attempt to see Mrs. Green that same night; but for her sake I felt that it would be wiser not to take any step of the kind, as her husband would probably be at home, and not at all likely to approve of the arrangement.

"Does Mrs. Green still go regularly to church?" I inquired of the vicar the following morning at breakfast.

"Yes, poor woman, she never misses a Sunday," was the answer.

"And he—Mr. Green?" I went on, somewhat hesitatingly; I was wondering how he would conduct himself towards me if we happened to meet.

"Indeed, he is not by any means so punctual in his attendance as he ought to be," replied Mr. Vaughan, with a very decided frown; "I am thinking of giving him a hint on the subject."

"Yes, I am sure he deserves a reprimand," chimed in old Miss Vaughan, "as it is the duty of a schoolmaster to set a good example in this respect to his pupils."

"He scarcely ever goes to church in the morning," consolingly remarked Miss Laura, coming up to me as we left the table, and

speaking in a half whisper—how clever she was in reading one's thoughts ; "so you will be able to see that dear Mrs. Green by herself after service."

I gave her a look and smile in token of thanks, and then she hurried away to get dressed, and not long afterwards she and her aunt and myself were walking along in the direction of the village church.

How strange it seemed to be sitting in the vicar's pew ! I almost fancied I must have changed my identity since last I worshipped within those venerable walls. Short though the time was, it had done the work of years upon my individuality—changed the whole current of my life, opened up new vistas, widened my horizon, and developed my character.

I could scarcely realise it, or believe that it was in very deed myself—the some-time isolated, student-lad, who had been wont to dream away so many lonely hours upon the "sad sea shore," with no companions save books, no particular aims or objects save such as were far away and dim and visionary—*myself* no longer a mere dreamer, or thinker, but a would-be worker, looking upon men

and things in an altogether different light to my former hazy vision; no longer solitary, but one of a class, beginning to have my sympathies drawn out in various directions, and conscious of a new-born fellow-feeling for all who, whatever might be their grade or social position, were yet in one way or another earnestly fulfilling their several duties in the world's great arena, battling perchance with their own many-sided difficulties, or else helping others to conquer theirs; fighting their way oftentimes amidst doubt and darkness and perplexity, manfully breasting the storm, and heroically facing tribulation.

Yes; I was certainly changed! I had, so far as mind and heart went, passed the transition stage from boyhood to manhood.

First, the crushing and overwhelming calamity of Mr. Joyce's death, with its terrible desolating effects; then the shock of his widow's re-marriage, together with Mr. Green's subsequent unkind treatment of myself, and what had afterwards followed in consequence; all conspired to make me leave my youth behind me, and feel as if I had entered upon an entirely new existence.

So wholly absorbed was I in these reflections, that I forgot all about Mrs. Green until I felt a soft touch upon my arm, and heard an excited voice whispering in my ear :

"Look up, Charlie—she's coming in now—I see the top of her bonnet."

Thus adjured, I *did* look up ; and by dint of twisting my head round, I was just able to get a passing glimpse of Mrs. Green's well-known face, as she quietly entered the church and seated herself in her accustomed place, a few pews behind ourselves.

I had neither time nor opportunity for discovering whether she was conscious of my own presence, as at that very moment the opening voluntary died away on the organ, and Mr. Vaughan stood up and commenced the service.

When it was over, I once more looked round, and this time there was no doubt as to my having been recognised, for I met her eyes fixed full upon me, and there was a smile of welcome upon her lips, while she remained expectantly waiting, until the little crowd which separated us should disperse, and allow us to exchange a more

satisfactory mode of greeting than that which could merely be expressed by looks.

At last—all impediments being removed—we found ourselves standing side by side in the little covered porch leading into the churchyard, telling each other how glad we were to meet again, and mutually asking and answering questions as to how we had been during this long interval of enforced separation.

Mr. Green's name was not once mentioned during that first interview, and though I should have liked to find out from her whether he was treating her well, I felt a sort of delicate shrinking from alluding to so painful a subject, unless she should of her own accord pave the way for it.

I accompanied her part of the way home, and might have gone further, but, as we approached the village street, her manner became so nervous and embarrassed, and she cast so many half frightened glances around her, that I concluded she must be in mortal terror lest her tyrannical husband should swoop down upon us, and probably take her to task for presuming to walk with me without having first obtained his permission to do so.

To set her mind at rest, therefore, I said presently, without allowing anything like surprise or annoyance to creep into my tone :

"Perhaps you would rather I did not come any further just now ?"

"Well, dear—it may be better not," she answered hesitatingly, but with an air of unmistakable relief.

"Very well ; I will say good-bye;" and I stood still and held out my hand. "I wonder when I shall see you again ?" I added, somewhat wistfully, as I noticed for the first time how much thinner and paler she looked than in the days gone by. "Could you not come to the vicarage ? choosing your own time you know," I went on meaningly ; "and then we might have a long talk, and——"

"Yes, yes," she eagerly interposed ; "I'll manage it somehow—never fear !" And with a little flickering smile, and a soft tender light shining in her eyes, she hurried away, leaving me to retrace my own steps, feeling uncomfortably conscious that my former suspicions with regard to Mr. Green's arbitrary and despotic temperament were only too well-founded, and that she had long ere this

discovered in her own unfortunate experience the truth of those dismal forebodings which I had so unsuccessfully essayed to sound in her unwilling ears on first hearing of her contemplated marriage.

I soon overtook Miss Vaughan and her niece, who had considerately left me to talk to Mrs. Green alone ; and before we reached the vicarage, the clergyman himself had joined us.

In the evening Mr. Vaughan invited me to drive with him to the next parish, where he had engaged to preach for a friend ; and when Miss Laura heard of the proposed plan, she insisted on making one of the party.

We attended this new church, therefore ; listened to one of the vicar's driest and longest sermons, and returned at length, in the semi-darkness, to find Miss Vaughan and the strange clergyman, whom the vicar has deputed to act as his substitute, engaged in an amicable discussion respecting a movement which the bishop of the diocese had recently set on foot, with the view of ameliorating the condition of a certain class of mechanics, who had suffered much from lack of employment during the winter

months, and stood, therefore, according to his judgment, in great need of a helping hand to enable them to make a fresh start.

I saw Mrs. Green again a few days later, and had a long conversation with her, in the course of which she questioned me with the greatest eagerness about myself; the kind of life I led at Mr. Whitworth's; the nature of my duties with regard to Harold Fortescue, the number of hours I required to study during term-time; and numerous other similar particulars; but I cannot say that she was equally communicative in talking about her own affairs.

She seemed, in fact, rather inclined to maintain a strict silence on the subject, and whatever information I did elicit was very reluctantly afforded, and only in answer to my anxious inquiries on the subject of Mr. Green's present mode of conducting himself towards her.

It was not mere idle curiosity which actuated me in thus wishing to ascertain whether she was moderately happy; but a sort of lingering hope that I might, in some as yet undiscovered way, be the means of

extricating her from her difficulties—an achievement, however, which, the more I considered it, the more difficult did it appear, so great was the risk of doing harm rather than good by attempting to interfere in ever so delicate and roundabout a fashion between herself and her husband.

From the peculiar way in which Mr. Vaughan spoke of him, I could easily see that he was by no means satisfied with the manner in which Mr. Green was performing his official duties, and I strongly suspected that if some change for the better did not soon take place in this respect, he would find himself dismissed from his post.

So many complaints had, from time to time reached Mr. Vaughan's ears of the schoolmaster's negligence and inefficiency, and the very slow progress which his pupils made under his tuition; and although, out of consideration for Mrs. Green, the vicar would fain have condoned her husband's faults if he could, he naturally felt that there was a point beyond which clemency would partake of the nature of weakness, a sort of temporising with evil such as he, with his proud and dominant spirit and strict notions

of right and wrong, would be the very last to approve of.

Happily for Mrs. Green's peace of mind, however, she did not seem just then to be aware of the frail tenure by which he held the situation that had been so well and ably filled by her first husband.

She only knew (this discovery I made not from herself, but from other quarters) that as time went on he seemed to grow more reckless and uncertain in his habits; the fictitious good qualities with which she had so liberally invested him, passed one by one out of sight, and that stability of character and undoubted steadiness, which she had from the very first given him credit for possessing in no ordinary degree, began gradually to leave him, until he had drifted into late hours; frequent and unexplained absences from home; a growing intimacy with certain questionable acquaintances (whose very names were held in disrepute by the more respectable members of the Saltsea community, on account of their idle dissolute habits, and the unblushing defiance with which they seemed to set at naught the laws alike of God and man), and numerous other

reprehensible practices, which filled his poor gentle wife with a sense of horrified dismay, such as she had never yet been conscious of feeling, and kept her in a state of most uncomfortable suspense, never knowing what fresh calamity might overtake her, what new delinquency her false-hearted husband might be guilty of, by way of forcing her to drink still deeper of the cup of humiliation and distress.

Mr. Green's natural artfulness and duplicity, and the extreme plausibility which he could so easily assume when it suited his purpose to exert himself, stood him now in good stead, as it enabled him to escape detection much longer than might under other circumstances have been possible.

His manner became so deferential and insinuating whenever he was brought into direct personal contact with any of the parochial authorities who happened to have a voice in the matter of examining into the affairs of the school, and his opinions were so invariably nothing more or less than an echo of the magnate's own, that in nine cases out of ten he was pronounced a most sensible and judicious teacher; and if any

rumours of a slighting nature did occasionally reach their ears, they were instantly dismissed as being unworthy of credence, and probably set down as the work of some enemy who wished to get him into trouble.

Mr. Vaughan's case was a totally distinct one. He prided himself upon his own independence and impartiality of judgment; and if the villagers had not stood too much in awe of him to speak freely in his presence —if instead of merely respectfully informing him that their boys did not get on under Mr. Green's superintendence, they had gone further, and explained that he was not, in point of character, what he ought to be—he would have instantly set about thoroughly investigating the matter, and ended most certainly in stripping away the mask which covered his real nature, and probably dismissed him from the Saltsea scenes altogether.

Long before my vacation had come to a close, I had been put into full possession of these and other important facts, too numerous to mention; and the only thing I really wondered at was Mr. Green's cleverness in

being able to succeed so well in evading actual disgrace.

Mrs. Grimshaw (the garrulous lodge-keeper, who had nursed me so kindly when I was laid up in her cottage, after my successful plunge in the lake, more than a year before Mr. Joyce's death, and whom I occasionally fell in with as I rambled about the vicarage grounds in company with the young lady whose fairy-like presence had on that occasion brought a ray of sunshine into the dingy little room which I was occupying, and served so effectually to beguile the tedium of my enforced seclusion) did not hesitate to tell me all that she knew about what she called the "schoolmaster's goings on;" but greatly to my relief, she always chose the time when I happened to be alone with her for getting upon this particular subject.

She seemed instinctively to recognise the fact that when the vicar's daughter was present she ought not to allude to it at all; "because," as she confidentially informed me one day, when I accidentally came across her in the grounds, "Miss Laura is such an impulsive darling, that if she heard anything

about anyone that she did not like, she would never rest until she had gone and told them all about it, and that, you know, would never do in Mr. Green's case."

"No, of course not," I answered, feeling that there was nothing else to say.

"He may not be quite such a bad man as we think," pursued Mrs. Grimshaw, with a very discouraging shake of her head; "but anyway, he's not what he ought to be, and I pity his poor wife from the very bottom of my heart."

"But I hope he is fairly kind to her," I observed, in a hesitating kind of way.

"Well, 'tis to be hoped he is;" was the evasive reply. "At any rate, there is no call to let his reverence know all the rumours that are afloat regarding him; because if he"—meaning Mr. Vaughan—"does not choose to encourage the poor people to tell him their troubles, and all that sort of thing, it stands to reason, you know, they cannot have the same confidence in him as they would if he was a kinder and more come-at-able man."

"Oh, I don't know," I replied, feeling it incumbent on me to say a word in my

patron's favour; "wherever I go, it seems to me he is treated with the greatest respect."

"Respect, indeed!" she retorted, with an air of superior wisdom. "No doubt that appears a fine thing to you, my lad, but to my mind it's not at all the kind of feeling a clergyman ought to inspire."

"Do you think not?" I inquired, very dubiously; "why, I always fancied——"

"You see, this is how the case stands," she continued, without paying the least attention to my doubtful tone; "the people are as a rule so much in awe of him, that they scarcely dare open their lips in his presence; while as for consulting him in their little difficulties, or looking to him for sympathy, why, they would never dream of such a thing; and if they did," smiling grimly, "well, I question whether he would have patience to listen to them."

"You are a Dissenter!" I exclaimed, a sudden recollective light flashing across my mind; "I had forgotten that."

"You think I am prejudiced," she answered, with a good-humoured laugh, "in favour of my own ministers?"

"It is of course quite natural that you should prefer the particular denomination to which you belong," I admitted, "but you must at any rate give Mr. Vaughan, so far, credit for being neither bigoted nor narrow-minded. Some clergymen," I added meaningly, "would set their faces against employing people who, like yourself and your husband, do not attend their own church."

"Yes, that's true enough;" she acquiesced; "I've known such cases in my own experience——"

"About Mr. Green, however," I hurriedly interposed, seeing that she was evidently prepared to launch out into a lengthy description of some of her 'experiences' in this respect; "I do hope he will improve."

"There's much need for improvement at the present moment," replied Mrs. Grimshaw, rather gloomily, "for, between ourselves, he's a downright hypocrite. They do say," she went on mysteriously, after she had glanced cautiously around her to make sure that there were no listeners, "that even the certificates be brought forward in proof of his being a proper person to step into Mr.

Joyce's place were nothing but forgeries, and that he knows no more about the duties of a schoolmaster than I do myself."

"It is very unfortunate," I murmured, a world of pity welling up in my heart for the poor deceived wife, who, if half the reports which were currently circulated in the village were true, would be sure to suffer either directly or indirectly from the collapse which must necessarily follow, so soon as these rumours should assume a definite form, and reach the ears of those most interested in the matter.

CHAPTER XII.

FIRST THOUGHTS ARE NOT ALWAYS BEST.

"When heaven half opens its arms, he who is faint-hearted deserves not anything. It is this want of faith that often keeps heaven from bestowing its blessings; and even when they descend, it is apt to send them away."

"Fortune and caprice govern the world."

By dint of very hard work, I was soon successful in obtaining sundry prizes, in the shape of exhibitions, etc., which enabled me to continue my course of study at the Middlebury College under still more favourable terms. But, better than all—to make a long story short—I gained at last the summit of my ambition, the thing of things which I most coveted—an open scholarship, enabling me to go to Oxford, where I hoped and

intended to take my degree, and afterwards be guided by circumstances as to my future destiny.

Mr. Vaughan was so much pleased at the way matters had turned out, that he came forward most generously, and insisted on being allowed the privilege—this is what *he* called it, though I gave it another and widely different name—of supplying the necessary funds to launch me creditably forth upon any profession which I might choose as being the most suitable in which to exercise my talents.

My own inclination, if that had been all which was wanting to settle this important question, would have led me to select the Bar, in preference to any other calling; and Mr. Vaughan, who happened, in some incidental way, to become acquainted with this fact, rather encouraged the idea, and offered me every facility for carrying it into effect.

Notwithstanding his kind wish that I should spend all my vacations at the vicarage, I had not done so, as Harold Fortescue's father was so delighted with the progress his son still continued to make under my superin-

tendence, that he soon began to entertain a very exaggerated opinion of my own individual merits, and a proportionate degree of dread lest my influence over the sometime idle and careless, but now really studious and diligent lad, should become weakened by separation. He begged me, therefore, as a personal favour, that I would accompany the latter whenever he went to Fortescue Hall —the name of their Yorkshire estate— offering me a handsome remuneration for my services, which offer I very naturally declined, knowing as I did that these so-called "services" were purely fictitious, existing only in old Mr. Fortescue's imagination, and that during the whole of my visits I had nothing whatever to do except enjoy myself.

I gratefully allowed him, however, to pay my travelling expenses for me ; and as time passed on I found myself obliged to receive more than one costly present from him.

I say *obliged*, because the peculiar way in which these presents were given utterly precluded me from refusing to receive them, however anxious I might have been to do so.

But I was *not* anxious; for I had grown to love the kind old man only second to his son, and having once arrived at this peculiar stage, it was no longer difficult for me to accept a favour at his hands; as I have always been of opinion that a mutual feeling of genuine affection between the giver and the receiver ought to—I do not venture to affirm that it invariably *does*—break down all other barriers, and do away with the crushing weight of obligation on the one hand, and a complacent sense of generosity on the other.

But to return to the subject of Mr. Fortescue's first earnest request, that I would accompany his son into Yorkshire.

I was so taken by surprise at the suggestion that I could scarcely realise what was required of me, nor plainly see what my duty, under the circumstances, would be. There were so many things to be considered. First and foremost, what was due to Mr. Vaughan, who had made every arrangement for me to return to the vicarage, and might consider it ungrateful of me were I to talk of changing his plans. Then, again, there was Mr. Whitworth to be consulted, as I naturally

wished, as far as I could possibly do so, to carry out his views, and take whatever step he might recommend ; and last, but certainly not least, I was anxious to discover what Harold's own ideas on the subject were—whether he would be pleased, or the reverse, at the prospect of having me about him as a sort of fixture, not only during term-time, but also in the vacations.

My mind was soon set at rest on this latter question, however, for directly he heard, through Mr. Whitworth, of his father's proposal, he came to me with a face and manner of such evident delight, that all my doubts vanished as if by magic, and I could plainly perceive that it was the arrangement of all others which he would himself have chosen, if his opinion had been asked on the subject.

"You positively *must* come, old fellow!" he rapturously exclaimed ; "I shall enjoy my holidays a thousand times more if you are with me than I should otherwise have done."

"Are you sure you are not saying this just to please me?" I asked, feeling secretly gratified at the warmth and unmistakable sincerity of his manner.

"Certain!" he responded, in a voice of decision; "I am far too selfish to think of anyone's interests except my own."

"I had a sort of fancy you would feel that you had had enough of me already," I explained, with a little smile.

"One cannot have too much of a good thing, you know," he answered lightly.

I shook my head rather dubiously, and he went on, with a touch of humour:

"It's just as well, too, that you should have an opportunity of keeping your eye upon me; as, if left entirely to my own devices, I might probably relapse into my old habits."

"I am not afraid of that," I replied in all sincerity, "you have succeeded so well of late, that you would never again be satisfied to become a mere idler."

"Oh, there's no knowing *what* I might become if I were deprived of your venerable society," he laughingly rejoined. "But, joking apart," he continued seriously, "I really *am* grateful to you for helping me to exert myself; and I'll tell you what it was which influenced me more than anything else."

"What?" I asked, as he paused.

"Well, it was seeing you work so hard yourself; so it's quite true what they say, example *is* better than precept any day."

"You only wanted a little encouragement," I observed.

"Yes, and that's just what you gave me," was Harold's quick reply, "instead of always bewailing my idleness, and groaning over my lack of application, you seemed to take it for granted from the very first that I should soon become as studiously inclined as yourself; and it was more from the fear of disappointing you than anything else, that I began at length to bestir myself in real earnest."

"Whatever the motive may have been, you deserve credit at any rate for persevering so well," I remarked cheerfully.

"You *will* go with me, will you not?" he asked, coming back to the holiday question; "the dear old Pater will be so glad to see you, and you will be quite in your element amongst all the musty folios at Fortescue Hall."

"I am sure I should like it," I replied; "but the first thing to do will be to

find out what Mr. Vaughan thinks about it."

"Bother Mr. Vaughan!" was the irreverent exclamation; "he will be sure to put his veto upon it, just because he wants you himself."

"You forget that it is pure kindness on his part asking me to the vicarage at all; I have no claim whatever upon him—no more than I have on yourself."

"No claim, indeed!" remonstrated my companion; "did you not save his daughter's life at the risk of your own?"

"Nonsense," I hastily objected, "that was nothing! a mere boyish impulse—not worth talking about."

"He thinks differently I suspect," significantly retorted the other. "It was Mr. Whitworth who told me about it; and he said——"

"There, never mind, Harold," I interposed somewhat impatiently; "it is perfectly ridiculous going back to that old story."

"All right," and he laughed good-humouredly, "we won't talk about it if you don't like. I only wanted to remind you that it is not altogether from disinterested

motives that Mr. Vaughan acts towards you as kindly as he does. He is proud of you, too; thinks you will turn out a sort of star, and reflect credit upon himself, and all that kind of thing; and then he's immensely rich, I hear, and can well afford to please himself by taking up a fancy if he likes, whether there happens to be a question of obligation or not."

I could not help being slightly amused at the extraordinary idea he seemed to have of Mr. Vaughan's character, and I smiled to myself as I proceeded to write to the latter, inclosing Mr. Fortescue's letter, and asking his advice as to whether it would be advisable for me to accept the proposal it contained, and accompany Harold to Fortescue Hall.

Almost before I had time to wonder what the answer would be, it came—not a letter, but himself—*in propria persona!*

"You are surprised to see me, Charlie?" he observed, as he shook hands with me in Mr. Whitworth's drawing-room, whither I had been summoned immediately on my return from the college the following morning; "but directly I got your letter I set out—and here I am."

"It was very kind of you to come so soon," I replied.

"I have already had a long talk with Mr. Whitworth on the subject," he observed, coming to the point at once, as was his usual habit in such cases, "and I'm afraid, from what he says, you will have to go to Yorkshire—always supposing, of course," he added quickly "that it coincides with your own wishes."

"I should like to do what seems right," I answered thoughtfully.

"Ah, yes, very good and proper," acquiesced my clerical friend; "still, I should wish you to consult your inclination a little," and he smiled graciously.

"For my own part," he continued presently, seeing that I was in no hurry to speak, "I won't disguise the fact that I shall be very sorry not to have you at the vicarage; while as for a certain young lady, whom I could name," he went on, a tender smile appearing on the generally stern set lips, "she will be indignant in the extreme if she hears you are not coming."

"Is she quite well?" I asked, with an air of eager interest, which I found myself quite unable to disguise.

"Yes, and she wanted to send all sorts of messages to you," was the amused reply, "only I had not time to listen to them."

"I should like to see her," I said, rather hesitatingly, "before I go—if I do go to Yorkshire."

"So you shall," he kindly assured me; "I will bring her over to spend a day at the deanery, unless you should make up your mind to decline Mr. Fortescue's invitation;" and he eyed me somewhat keenly.

"I would much prefer being guided by you in the matter," I replied, looking up with a sudden resolve.

"That places me in a little difficulty," was the reflective rejoinder; "on the one hand, I would rather have you at the vicarage, while on the other, Mr. Whitworth is so strongly in favour of your falling in with his relative's suggestion, that I fear it would not be wise of me to urge you to the contrary."

"Harold wishes it, too," I said, more to myself than my dignified companion, "so perhaps I had better go."

"Well, it may be best," acknowledged Mr. Vaughan; "indeed, I believe it will be,

so we will consider the matter settled;" and then he proceeded to enter into a few practical considerations with regard to my approaching visit.

He did not forget his promise to bring Miss Laura to Middlebury; and I had the honour of being invited to the deanery to meet her, and in the afternoon I took her to hear the cathedral choir sing one of their sweetest anthems, which delighted her beyond measure, as she was passionately fond of music, and would stay for hours listening to it—if she only had the chance—displaying, in the meantime, none of that restlessness which usually characterised her, but sitting, on the contrary, perfectly still, listening with a rapt intense interest to each note, and never apparently becoming weary, or allowing her attention for one moment to wander to other things.

Afterwards I returned with her to the deanery, and when she had said good-bye to her friends there, she went back with me to Mr. Whitworth's, where it was arranged the vicar should join her, and have tea before starting for home.

So long as she found herself among other

people she refrained from giving me the benefit of her opinion as to my forthcoming visit; but directly we were alone she turned towards me with a solemnly reproachful air, saying very decidedly:

"It's not at all *nice* of you, Charlie, to want to go away from us."

"I don't *want* to go," I answered soothingly.

"Why do you do it, then?" she not unnaturally demanded.

"It is a question of duty," I vaguely replied.

"I don't believe it's your *duty* at all," she scornfully retorted; "Mason always told me it was wicked to tell stories; and now you are telling one, or at least," this was added rather hesitatingly, "making papa tell one, which is just as bad."

"I assure you it is a mistake," I faltered, fairly bewildered by this new view of the case; "I should be very sorry to say what wasn't true."

"I don't know about being sorry," she pouted, while something very like tears gathered in the lovely violet eyes, "but you've done it. Papa told me over and over

again that you were going to spend all your holidays at the vicarage ; and now you won't come ; so you've made poor papa say what isn't true."

"But I always intended to come, if Mr. Vaughan would have me," I seriously endeavoured to explain.

"Yes, but you are not doing it," she persisted, "and I do think it's very unkind of you to go away with that horrid boy, who doesn't want you a bit, and leave *me* all by myself."

"But, dear Miss Laura, you have got your papa, and your aunt, and Miss Belmont, and Mason, and lots of other people," I wonderingly reminded her.

"I don't care, I want you !" she exclaimed, in her old imperious way ; "*they*," throwing any amount of disdain into her voice, "can't amuse me scarcely at all."

"As far as that goes, I'm afraid I should not be much use either," I replied, with the utmost seriousness.

"Oh yes, you would," she eagerly responded; "you always did what I wanted the last time you came ; and now I had got such a lot of nice plans in my head about things

I was going to do, or," candidly correcting herself, "make you do for me."

"There's no one in the world I would rather do things for than yourself," I impulsively assured her; and almost without knowing what I did, I put out my hand, and gently touched one of hers, glancing earnestly, meanwhile, into the lovely, delicately tinted countenance.

"Isn't there—*really?*" she asked, with one of those swift changes of mood and manner which rendered her so irresistibly attractive.

"Really," I affirmed, with a smile.

"Then I'll forgive you," was the magnanimous announcement, and the small hand I had just touched was confidingly slipped into mine, while the last remaining vestige of indignation cleared away from the smooth white forehead, and her eyes literally danced with generous satisfaction.

"That's right," I responded, gently pressing the little hand; "I should not like to feel you were angry with me."

"No; it's very naughty of me to scold, and I won't do it again," was her penitent rejoinder, "and I dare say you couldn't help it.

"Shall I tell you a secret?" I asked, stooping down, and speaking in a semi-confidential tone.

"Yes, do," she delightedly cried, standing on tiptoe, the better to look into my face.

"If it only depended upon my own *feelings*," I proceeded, in a grave mysterious whisper, "I would much rather stay with you than go with him—so now you know all about it."

"Yes—and it's *good* of you to go—I am sure it is;" and she seemed as eager now in making allowances for me, as she had hitherto been in finding fault.

"Well, my little rosebud, how are you getting on?" asked Mr. Vaughan, who happened to come just at that moment into the room, "not tired of Middlebury yet?"

"It's not Middlebury I am thinking of, papa," was the half reproving answer, "but Charlie."

"Ah, yes; you are a very staunch little lady, I'll say that for you!" laughed her indulgent father; "she never forgets a friend—do you, my pet?" turning lovingly towards her.

"I've not been *very* friendly, though," she compunctiously informed him, "until just now."

"What have you been doing; scolding him, I suppose?" and there was a humorous twinkle in the vicar's eye not often seen there.

"Indeed, Miss Laura has been most kind," I hastily interposed, seeing that she was about to reproach herself for the few indignant words she had spoken. "She did not exactly understand my motives for going away at first, but now she is quite satisfied;" and I glanced smilingly at her.

"Yes," she answered; "but why do you call me *Miss* Laura? I call you Charlie; why don't you say Laura?"

"Oh, the cases are not quite the same," I stammered out, as I darted a quick uneasy glance at her dignified father.

"I don't like to be called Miss Laura," she went on, with a little imperious gesture; "it's only the servants who do that."

I do not know whether Mr. Vaughan noticed the sudden flush which passed over my face as she said this; it is just possible that he did. At any rate, he promptly came

to my assistance, by saying, in a voice which savoured even to my proudly sensitive ear of nothing but kindness :

"I am sure, now that Charlie knows your extreme anxiety on the subject, he will do his best to oblige you. The fact is," he continued, turning smilingly round upon myself, "she's a little bit of a tyrant in her way, so you must humour her."

"It won't be difficult," I replied, regarding him with rather a conscious look.

"Then you *will* call me Laura?" was the young lady's somewhat anxious inquiry.

"Yes, if you and Mr. Vaughan do not object," I replied, in a low tone.

"*Object!*" and the soft eyes opened to their widest extent. "What funny creatures boys are, to be sure! Why, I've been *begging* you to do it, and now you say if we don't object; isn't it very odd, papa?"

"Very odd indeed," he assented, without once glancing in my direction.

Fortunately for my own equanimity, I was saved the necessity for anything in the shape of explanation by the simultaneous entrance of Mr. Whitworth, his sister, Mrs. May, and Harold Fortescue; and a few minutes later

we were sitting down to an informal meal, a sort of substantial tea, which was intended to supplement the deanery luncheon, and make up to the vicar and his daughter in some measure for the loss of their late dinner.

I saw the latter's eyes fixed from time to time very thoughtfully upon Harold's face, and *he* seemed for his part to be quite conscious of her investigation, and somewhat at a loss to account for it.

At last, during a temporary lull in the conversation, she turned deliberately towards me, and remarked, in a stage whisper, which was perfectly audible to everyone at the table :

"I think perhaps, Charlie, he's not *quite* such a horrid boy as I fancied."

"My dear Laura," began her scandalised father remonstratingly, and then he stopped, apparently unable to think of anything further to say, and cast his eyes helplessly upon the tablecloth.

"Is it of me you are speaking ?" inquired Harold, in a voice of commendable gravity, though I could plainly see that it was only by making a strenuous effort that he prevented himself from exploding.

"Yes," she replied, in a perfectly simple and unhesitating fashion, just as if it was the most natural and matter-of-fact thing imaginable.

"I wonder what I can have done to merit your disapproval?" said Harold, his merry eyes regarding her with pretended anxiety.

"I was *very* angry with you at first," she condescended to explain, "but I don't mind it quite so much now;" nodding her head gleefully at me, as if to remind me of the little secret I had told her.

"Angry with me?" repeated Harold, with an injured-innocence air.

"Yes; I thought it was so horrid of you to take Charlie away from me," she frankly proceeded.

"My dear Laura," once more commenced Mr. Vaughan.

"Well, papa, it's true," she stoutly maintained; "I *did* think it horrid, and mean, and selfish."

"Oh, Miss Vaughan, pray spare me!" cried her intensely amused auditor; "I had no idea I was such a dreadful character."

"I am not Miss Vaughan," she replied, with seeming irrelevance; "my aunt is Miss

Vaughan—I am called Laura by my friends, and Miss Laura by the servants and poor people."

"And is there any particular name by which you would wish your enemies to call you ?" demanded Harold, with much demureness.

"Why, I haven't any enemies," she replied, glancing at him in amazement; "unless," she added, as she noticed the mischievous expression of his face, "you mean yourself."

"Oh no, I am of too forgiving a spirit, I am thankful to say, to wish to harbour resentment against you for forming such an unfavourable opinion of me."

"But I don't think quite so bad of you now," she condescendingly volunteered to assure him; "you seem to be a good-natured kind of a boy;" eyeing him rather superciliously, "and if you are too stupid to amuse yourself, of course, you could not help wanting poor Charlie to do it for you."

"Worse and worse, Harold," laughed Mr. Whitworth. "I hope by this time you are properly impressed with a sense of your deficiencies."

"Yes, I shall soon have to hide my diminished head," he observed, with an expression of the most ludicrous consternation; "I scarcely know which I appreciate the most, her indignation at my supposed 'badness,' or the contemptuous pity with which she alludes to my 'stupidity.'"

"I hope you will not allow yourself to be in the slightest degree annoyed at my little girl's apparent rudeness," observed Mr. Vaughan, in a courteous and gentlemanly tone, "as I can assure you——"

"There is no need to apologise," quickly interrupted Mr. Whitworth; "Harold quite understands!" turning inquiringly round upon him.

"Perfectly," he answered, with a pleasant smile.

"*Was* I rude, Charlie?" demanded the young lady rather anxiously; she happened to be sitting next me.

"Not at all," I promptly replied; "you only made a little mistake, as Harold is by no means stupid, and it was his father, not himself, who first asked me to go home with him."

"Doesn't *he* really want you at all, then?"

she asked, with a little pucker of perplexity.

"Indeed I do," quickly exclaimed Harold; "but it's *not* because I expect him to furnish me with a constant fund of amusement, as you seem to imagine, but rather that he may bestow on me a portion of his own natural gravity; for, between ourselves," turning to her with a little confidential movement of the head, while he purposely dropped his voice, as if not wishing us to hear the drift of this last remark, "*we* have been in the habit of fancying that he was, if anything, too sober and solemn in his manner; about the very last person, in short, to wish to associate with because of his liveliness. We may be mistaken, you know," he went on, with feigned humility, "and what we call gravity *may* be neither more nor less than the essence of cheerfulness, and he himself the most amusing of companions."

"Of course he is," was the unhesitating declaration; "he *always* amuses me."

"But I thought it was only stupid people who required to *be* amused," laughingly objected the incorrigible Harold.

"Yes, but boys and girls are *so* different,"

she explained, in tones of the most sublime disdain; "boys ought *never* to be dull."

"Oh, I see;" and Harold's mirthful countenance was a study, as, after turning to answer some question suddenly propounded to him by Mr. Whitworth, he rose from his seat, and held out his hand to the plain-spoken young lady, whom Mrs. May was just carrying off to her own room for the purpose of putting on her things, saying, with the greatest gravity:

"I must bid you good-bye now, I fear, as I'm obliged to hurry off to the post-office."

"Good-bye," she graciously responded; "I hope you'll enjoy your holidays." This polite little speech was evidently intended to make up for her former uncomplimentary comments.

"Thank you," he smilingly rejoined, "I hope I shall; and perhaps," he added interrogatively, "you may have a better opinion of me when I come back?"

A half shake of the golden head and a silvery peal of laughter was the only reply vouchsafed to this suggestion, and as the

door closed upon her sylph-like form, I felt somehow as if everything that had previously made the room bright and attractive had suddenly disappeared.

END OF VOL. I.

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